

Water Asphyxiation in Dogs
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Asphyxiation is the state or process of being deprived of oxygen, which can result in unconsciousness or death; suffocation. Specifically, water asphyxiation is when inhaled water or other liquids get in the airway and make it difficult to breath. This can happen to any species, any breed, and can occur over a period. Even temporary suffocation can have an influence on your dog. There are many signs, symptoms, and ways to avoid or help a canine from asphyxiation.

Have you ever wondered if a dog could hold its breath? Well, the answer is yes. Dogs instinctively can do this; it does not have to be taught. When a dog's face hits the water, typically their heart rate slows down to reduce the need for oxygen. Their windpipe closes so that no water may enter the lungs. Dogs with longer snouts, long legs, webbed paws are usually able to hold their breath longer. On average 5-10 seconds is how long they are able to hold their breath. Now, just because a dog can hold its breath does not mean they will never suffocate from water. Inhaling water is still very possible while a dog is swimming.

There are many ways to prevent a dog from suffocating or inhaling water. First, make them take a break. When a dog like being in the water, they most likely will not tell you when they are tired or done swimming. So, keeping an eye on them is very important. If you can tell they are tired and taking in a lot of water, make them take a break. Some signs of exhaustion include hot ear temperature and excessive panting. At least every 30 minutes a dog should get out of the water and take some time off if not sooner. Also, encourage a dog not to dive under water for toys. Having their mouth open under water, chances are they will inhale some of that water. Choose toys that float and are flat so that their mouths can stay more closed. Another way to help avoid drowning would be to make sure that the canine is wearing a life vest. This way they have that extra support to keep them afloat especially since not all dogs can swim. A good thought would be to make sure you have plenty of drinking water for your dog so that they are not trying to drink water as they are swimming. These are just a few ways to prevent and improve the safety of dogs so that they do not suffocate.

There are many signs of suffocation in dogs and any inhalation of water, even small amounts, can affect them. Sometimes symptoms take hours or even days before showing up. Some symptoms include foaming at the mouth, coughing, blue gums, trouble breathing, loss of balance, and unconsciousness. Others may include vomiting with a hunched back and extended neck; vomit would look like a clear liquid. If he/she does this just once or twice no need to alarm, if it continues and other symptoms appear you will want to see a vet. Many would compare a dog's symptoms to a drunk person, imagine the dog losing its balance and acting disoriented. Pawing at the mouth is also a very common symptom. Many times, if they are choking and having trouble breathing, they are not able to alert you by whining. So, pawing at the mouth is a sign that something is irritating them and in this instance that they cannot breathe correctly.

Another aspect to remember about water asphyxiation is that it does not just occur when dogs are swimming. It can also happen when a dog drinks too quickly or too much. If you notice your dog has a tendency to cough after drinking a lot of water, try limiting the amount given at one time. By giving smaller portions of water at a time it will make sure that they dog cannot drink too much too fast and help prevent asphyxiation.

If you are ever in a situation where you notice a dog suffocated from water inhalation there are a few things, you can do. First, you must remember not to panic. This will in turn keep your dog as calm as possible and keep their heart rate slow. When choking on water holding small dogs or puppies upside down can help drain the water from their lungs. For larger dogs if they are standing you can lift their hind legs so that water can again drain out. If you know how to do the Heimlich maneuver on dogs that could work as well. Those are if you notice right away that a dog is struggling to breath because they are suffocating on water. If symptoms of dry drowning start to appear after a period of time the best thing to do would be taking the dog to the veterinarians. Veterinarians will assess the severity of the case and evaluate what needs to be done. In some cases, CPR may need to occur. In most cases of drowning the dog will be hospitalized at least overnight for oxygen therapy and IV fluids. Depending on how severe the case is, the dog may be given some medications for brain swelling or antibiotics to prevent pain, nausea, etc. It in any instance you feel something is wrong, going to the veterinarian for advice is always the best thing to do.

It is important to keep a close eye on any dog that is near or in water. Especially knowing that as little as 1 mL can lead to dry drowning. All the fear and anxiety of what to do if a dog is drowning can be eliminated by taking preventative action. If you ever fear that your dog is dry drowning it is important to seek medical attention. Even if it is a minor case, seeking medical attention is never a bad thing.

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