



## CPR and Resuscitation in Pets

Just like in human medicine, there are resuscitation codes in veterinary medicine. What does this mean, and why is this important? A resuscitation code is a set of instructions indicating what life-saving measures a patient, or in this case a pet owner, desires if their heart or breathing stops. This can be scary to think about, but it is important for your veterinary staff to know your wishes so they can act quickly in an emergency situation. You are your pet's voice. By thinking ahead and discussing resuscitation preferences, you are taking a powerful step in advocating for their care.

So what does CPR look like in pets? Pet CPR is similar to that in humans, but there are a few differences.

- **Closed chest CPR** - this involves chest compressions, assisted ventilation, and emergency medications. This can be performed for up to 20 minutes.
- **Open chest CPR** - this may be initiated if chest compressions are not effective, if it is a large dog, or if there is a disease in the chest cavity (fluid or air). This involves opening the chest cavity to gain direct access to the heart. A cardiac massage may be performed at this point, which is when the heart is manually compressed. While potentially life-saving, the success rate for open chest CPR in pets is often low and highly dependent on the underlying condition; this is considered a very high risk procedure.

Having your veterinarian or your technician ask for a resuscitation code is not meant to stress you out. We are not anticipating an emergency situation, we are just preparing in the event that one does happen. Knowing your wishes before a crisis occurs ensures your pet receives care that aligns with your values and expectations. So what are the resuscitation codes that we offer at East Oak Animal Hospital?

- **Green Code** - In the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest, all available measures will be taken to revive the pet. This includes emergency medications, oxygen therapy, and closed chest CPR.
- **Red Code - Do Not Resuscitate (DNR)** - This means in the event of cardiac or respiratory arrest, life-saving measures will not be taken. This does not mean that the patient suffers; compassion and care will be provided, but there will be no further intervention.
  - *DNR reflects a thoughtful and compassionate decision about quality of life. Choosing this code does not mean we stop caring for your pet in the event of an emergency; pain relief and comfort are the goals. We respect your decision to allow natural death in the event of an arrest, while continuing to provide supportive and palliative care.*

Thinking about your pet in a life-threatening situation is not easy and talking about resuscitation can feel overwhelming. Our staff is here to support and guide you through the process with compassion. There are a few factors to consider when choosing a resuscitation code:

- Your pet's overall health and prognosis
- What level of intervention you are comfortable with
- Your beliefs around quality of life
- Financial and emotional considerations

No one knows your pet better than you do, but if you are unsure about your decision do not hesitate to ask questions. There is no "right" or "wrong" answer, your decision should reflect what you believe is the best option for your pet; there is no judgement. Emergencies are hard. Talking about resuscitation is hard. But not knowing what to do in a crisis is even harder. By having a resuscitation code in place, you give your pet the best chance—whether that's through life-saving CPR or through a peaceful passing in accordance with your values.