

# How to Stop a Bleeding Toenail

## BACKGROUND

Occasionally pets will catch their toenails on carpeting, metal grates, or rocks and will break or tear the nails, causing them to bleed. Clipping the toenail too close to the quick can also make it bleed. It is easy to stop the bleeding of the toenail with products you have in your home.

## GETTING STARTED

Equipment/materials needed:

- Gauze or paper towel
- Cornstarch or flour
- Paper plate or paper napkin

It can take a few minutes to stop a bleeding toenail, but this can seem like a long time, especially for people who are squeamish at the sight of blood. There is no need to worry about the health effects of a bleeding toenail that bleeds for 3 to 5 minutes, because the amount of blood lost is insignificant.

## TROUBLESHOOTING BEFOREHAND

If at any time your pet shows resentment to having this done, stop the procedure and call your veterinarian for further advice. The area may be too painful to treat without additional medications, and it is imperative that you do not put yourself in a position of risk where your pet's discomfort might translate into your getting scratched or bitten. This may also be an indication that the injury is worse than originally thought and needs to be rechecked immediately. The following instructions apply to the most common toenail injuries, which are broken or cut tips of the nails. More serious injuries such as fractures of the bone in the toe, or deeper injuries such as lacerations (cuts) of the skin of the paw, will not

be helped by this technique and should instead be treated by your veterinarian.

## PROCEDURE

- Place a small amount of cornstarch or flour (about 1 teaspoon, or 5 mL) onto the paper plate or napkin.
- Dab the wound area with a clean, wet gauze or paper towel.
- Pick up a pinch of cornstarch or flour between your thumb and forefinger, and apply it directly to the bleeding toenail. You should have the powder pinched between your fingertips, and you advance the toenail between your fingers so it is embedded in the powder you are holding.
- The result is that you should apply a gentle but firm compression of the powder against the toenail, holding it for 10 to 15 seconds. This will let the powder pack onto the cut or broken surface of the nail, causing the blood to clot. Some pets are more sensitive to this than others, so be sure to stabilize the leg so your pet cannot pull away. If you cannot comfortably do this, stop and bring your pet to the veterinarian instead.
- Cornstarch or flour will help the blood stay clotted and stop the bleeding in most cases. If the bleeding restarts, you may try this technique again. If bleeding persists despite this approach, cauterization may be necessary at your veterinarian's.

## AFTERWARDS

You may need to take your pet to the veterinarian to have the toenail examined or removed if it is needed (often required as a result of trauma). You can also apply a bandage or sock to the foot to add protection for a few hours after the application of cornstarch or flour.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*The toenail is hanging by a few threads. Should I just take it off?*  
You may try and remove the nail, but if it is extremely painful (which is common), your pet should have this done under sedation or anesthesia (consider how much it would hurt to remove an entire human fingernail). Therefore, any sign of pain or resentment is a good reason to call your veterinary hospital and have this taken care of there.

*I cut my pet's nails too short, causing them to bleed. How can I prevent this?*

Pets have a blood supply to the toenail, and when the nails are cut too short, they will bleed. You can prevent this by only trimming the "hook" of the nail. If your pet's toenails are clear or white, you can see the pink part of the nail, and you need to avoid this. If you cut into the pink portion of the nail, it will bleed. Black toenails also have this blood supply but cannot be easily seen, so you should

ask your veterinarian or a veterinary technician to show you how short to cut these nails.

*The toenail fell off, but my pet continues to lick the toe. Should I prevent him or her from licking it?*

Yes, always prevent a pet from licking the same area consistently. A pet can cause more damage licking an area because the tongue causes irritation and introduces bacteria into the exposed tissues. You may want to place a sock over the paw, carefully taping it in place (not too tight, to be sure the circulation to the paw remains adequate). This helps protect the paw as well as keeping the floors and carpets cleaner. Applying an Elizabethan collar (E-collar) to your pet is also an option; make sure the E-collar is longer than the nose and that the pet cannot extend the foot around the collar, to the mouth. E-Collars can be purchased at your veterinary hospital or pet specialty store.

Practice Stamp or Name & Address