



CARE OF IV CATHETERS

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Why do we use IV catheters?

Moderate to severe dehydration is especially common in neonates with scours, but is also seen in animals that don't feel well and are off feed. Placing a catheter in the jugular vein allows easy access to the body's most important fluid reservoir, is much more secure than a simple needle in the vein, and prevents multiple sticks that may make an animal needle-shy and difficult to treat.

What do you put through a catheter?

In most cases, dehydration is the main reason to place a catheter. Depending on the level of dehydration, an animal may require multiple liters of fluids to restore normal blood volume and hydration status - the larger the animal and the more dehydrated they are, the more they'll need. We can also add extra electrolytes and vitamins the animal may have lost through diarrhea or lack of appetite.



How does an IV catheter work?

A catheter consists of a large needle (called a stylet) surrounded by a plastic tube (the catheter itself). When your veterinarian places the catheter, they will shave and clean an area over the jugular vein, hold it off, and insert the catheter, adjusting as necessary until blood comes from the end of the catheter. The stylet is removed, and a T-port (a special catheter extension) or a cap is placed on the catheter's open end. The catheter is flushed to prevent blood clots from clogging the catheter and sutured into place. If a T-port is attached, the T-port is also sutured to the skin. Now you have easy, safe, and stable access to the animal's blood volume!

Depending on the type of catheter, they may stay in one to five days, as long as they are regularly flushed and checked to make sure they stay in place and do not kink or slip out of the vein.



Keep It Clean!

IV catheters are a direct line into the animal's blood, so cleanliness is EXTREMELY important!

- Do not remove caps, leaving the catheter's end open to air, dust, and other contaminants
- Before inserting anything into the cap, use gauze or a cotton ball damp with alcohol to clean the cap
- Flush the catheter twice daily with heparinized saline - this prevents blood clots forming within the catheter, prolonging the catheter's useful life
- Keep animals in a clean, dry stall, removing soiled bedding routinely

IV catheters can be lifesavers as long as they're properly cared for!

Catheter Removal

Once the animal is rehydrated or if the catheter is no longer useable, the sutures are removed, the catheter is carefully removed from the vein, and the site is held off with clean gauze to ensure there is no bleeding from the site.

IV Fluid Setup & Catheter Security

Your veterinarian will use a fluid extension set (also called an IV line or solution set) to connect the fluid bag to the catheter. Most solution sets are connected to the T-port or cap by a needle so that the catheter remains a "closed system," in that the cap is not removed and the vein is not exposed to the environment. The fluid rate is set by a dial on the solution set.

Many animals that are dehydrated pretty much stay in one spot, but once they are rehydrated and feel better, they become more mobile. Your veterinarian may wrap the catheter with Vetwrap to protect it from active animals, leaving the end of the T-port or the cap visible and available for access. The IV line may also be secured to the head or neck with tape or Vetwrap to prevent the line from being pulled out and losing fluids on the ground.

When the bag is empty, roll the dial to pinch off all flow of fluids down the IV line, remove the needle from the catheter cap, cap the needle and keep the IV line attached to the now empty bag. If the animal needs more fluids soon, we can reuse the IV line as long as everything remains clean. Flush the catheter with sterile saline or heparinized saline from your vet and, if using a T-port, clamp the white clamp to prevent back flow of blood into the catheter.

