

# BEYOND BASICS

The following article provides further insight to curriculum provided in Chapter 7 of Today's Bowhunter Student Manual. The author is NBEF Board Member, worldwide bowhunter, and physician, Jack Frost.

Typically animals hit in the abdominal cavity will 'hump up', walk away slowly, and often lie down within 50-200 yards. They often leave very little blood trail. They are not incapacitated by rapid loss of blood and so if disturbed may then run a long ways and be very difficult to find.

**CONCLUSION: An animal with an abdominal cavity shot will usually become sick and die within 8-12 hours.**

The mechanism of death involved with gut shots can vary. There are some big blood vessels in the guts (gastric, mesenteric, splenic, and renal arteries) and some gut shot animals may die in 1-2 hours from simple blood loss. That is why if the archer sees a gut shot animal lie down and can still see the animal (from his tree stand or whatever), he should simply remain quiet and watch to see what happens. He may witness the animal suddenly kicking and trying to get up but unable to do so. The animal will then roll over and expire.

Peritonitis (inflammation of the abdominal lining) can be caused by blood, digestive juices, bacterial infection and/or stomach contents. The amount and composition of each fluid can affect how rapidly the animal succumbs to the wound. There will be massive fluid infusion into the abdominal cavity that causes dehydration and thirst, which is why gut shot animals that do get up and move from their original bed, may seek water. Septic shock that develops as a result of massive bacterial contamination and growth is probably what contributes to ultimate death and that is what takes 8-12 hours (sometimes even longer).

**NOTE: I used to believe that every gut shot animal eventually died of the wound. However, I was recently told by a veterinarian who specializes in large animals, that ruminants (cows, deer, elk, sheep— animals that chew their cud) can occasionally survive gut wounds.**

Regardless of whether dead or just very sick, usually after 8 hours a gut shot animal is not nearly as likely to jump up and run away as if you were to disturb it after just 1-2 hours. Hence the Chapter 7 appropriate recommendation to wait 6-8 hours after a strongly suspected gut shot before following up. Even after 6-8 hours, trailing or grid searching for a gut shot animal should be very slow and quiet because the animal may still be alive.



**“Based on my personal bowhunting experience and extensive conversations with other bowhunters, I know that a small percentage of gut shot animals die from bleeding in less than two hours after being hit. Probably over half are dead within six hours. Most are dead by twelve hours. A tiny percentage may actually survive the hit. However, the majority of gut shot animals will be incapacitated and unable to get away by either span of time (6-8 hours or 8-12 hours) if you can find them. Every situation is different. It is not a conflict of terminology or bowhunting technique to recommend *not* following up until 6-8 hours even though it may take 8-12 hours for the animal to die.”**  
.....Jack Frost.

## **BOTTOM LINE: STRIVE TO NEVER MAKE ANOTHER GUT HIT!!!!!!!**

I strongly believe a gut shot animal which gets out of sight before lying down should not be followed for at least 6-8 hours. My personal rule (and what I teach) is if I have a poor hit on an animal before 10 AM, I will not try to follow up on it sooner than 6-8 hours (or 4-6 PM that afternoon). Actually, I like to give myself about 2 hours before dark to start trailing assuming that at least 6-8 hours have passed since the shot.

If I shoot an animal in the afternoon and believe it is a gut shot I will always wait until the next morning (often 12 or more hours later). I do not let rain, snow, fear of coyotes or bears, or needing to get to school or work interfere with this rule. It is better to search for a dead animal under six inches of fresh overnight snow within 200 yards of where it was first hit than to have to search in a one (or more) mile radius of where it was first hit under that same six inches of snow.

**NOTE: Arguably, if it is mandatory that we be in school or at work tomorrow morning then perhaps we should not be hunting this afternoon or evening. On the other hand, if the decision is made to hunt into the afternoon and evening of your last day then the ethical thing to do following a gut shot is to miss a half day of school/work but have recovered the animal.**