

Common Household Poisons

Home, Toxic Home!

Home is the place where we feel the most safe. However, for the four-footed members of your family, your home can also hold a lot of unrecognized dangers. For instance, did you know that many common food items or household products can sicken or even kill pets? Don't panic! A few simple precautions can help keep your pet safe.

Frightening Foods

You probably know that chocolate can be poisonous to pets, but what about grapes, raisins, onions, garlic, macadamia nuts, avocados, coffee, alcohol, yeast, and the common sugar-free sweetener, xylitol (often found in chewing gum and baked goods)? All of these items can also be

Sweets That Are Not So Sweet

If you suspect that your pet has consumed any amount of any chocolate, you should call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's hotline (888-426-4435). However, not all chocolates are equally dangerous to pets. In general, the darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is to animals. Baker's chocolate is the most dangerous of all because it contains the highest concentration of the responsible chemical, called *methylxanthine*. Pets that eat too much of this substance can have vomiting, diarrhea, excessive thirst and urination, hyperactivity, and, in severe cases, abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, and seizures.

Another "sweet" substance of growing concern is xylitol. This is an artificial sweetener that is found in many sugar-free items, such as candy, gum, beverages, and desserts. It can be very toxic to pets, causing life-threatening liver failure in some cases.



Store all chemicals out of reach of your pet, just as you would for children.

dangerous to pets, so it's important not to give them to your pet as treats or to store them or leave them out where your pet may be able to get to them. Take special care during holiday seasons and festive occasions. It is all too easy to start cooking and forget that you left a package of baker's chocolate on the counter, or to start socializing with guests and leave an alcoholic drink on a coffee table.

Even food that isn't actually poisonous can be a problem. Many people foods are too fatty for pets and can cause digestive upset, which can be severe. It's generally not a good idea to give your pet table food as a treat.

Pets Are Not "Mini People"

It's important to keep in mind that pets are not "mini people." They react to substances in food and medicines completely differently than we do, so just because something doesn't make us sick doesn't mean it is okay for our pets. Also, pets are generally much smaller than people, so what we might think is a tiny, harmless amount of a food or drug can make them ill.

For these reasons, you should never give your pet a medicine meant for people unless you've been told to by a veterinary professional. Many common over-the-counter drugs can be extremely toxic to pets. Don't leave medicine bot-

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bles out where pets can reach them (a determined dog can chew through a childproof cap!), and be careful to pick up any dropped pills immediately. Use the same caution with dietary supplements or with products you buy at the health-food store.

Be on Guard in the Yard

Vigilance shouldn't stop at your front door, either. If you have a garage, shed, or garden, chances are that you have at least some of the following:

- **Plants:** If you have pets, you have a responsibility to know which plants can be toxic to pets and under what circumstances. Tomatoes, for example, are in the nightshade family. Many lilies, flowers, and common ornamental shrubs can be toxic. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) maintains a comprehensive

online list (www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/).

- **Pest poisons:** Whether you're wiping out rats, mice, bugs, or weeds, be careful how you apply and store any poisons around your home. Remember, these products are meant to kill! Rodenticides, pesticides, and herbicides are very common causes of poisoning in pets.

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- **Garden products:** Cocoa mulch, fertilizers, and compost piles are also unsafe for pets. Make sure any mulch or fertilizer you apply to your yard is safe for pets to play in (and possibly eat). Keep your pet out of areas treated with toxic products. Compost piles can grow bacteria and fungi that are highly toxic to pets, so if you have a compost pile, make sure your pet cannot get into it, and don't compost dairy or meat items.
- **Garage chemicals:** Any chemical in your garage can be dangerous to pets. Antifreeze, in particular, can be deadly. Store all chemicals out of reach of your pet (just as you would for children), and carefully mop up any spills.

Remember, pets are curious. If something smells good, they'll eat it. If they can get into a container, they will. Be aware of what substances may be toxic to your pet, and store and use them safely.

In an Emergency...

If your pet does eat something he or she shouldn't, time is of the essence! Call your veterinarian's office or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's hotline (888-426-4435) immediately and be prepared to describe what your pet ate, how long ago, and how much. If possible, bring some of the substance, including any label information available, with you if you are asked to bring your pet in for an exam.

Top 10 Pet Poisons

The ASPCA maintains a 24-hour poison control hotline, which handles more than 100,000 cases of pet poisonings every year. Based on those cases, the top offenders are:

- Human medicines
- Insecticides
- People food
- Rodenticides
- Veterinary medicines that are given incorrectly (e.g., wrong medicine, wrong amount)
- Plants
- Chemicals (e.g., antifreeze, pool/spa chemicals)
- Household cleaners (e.g., bleach, detergent)
- Heavy metals (e.g., lead paint chips, linoleum)
- Fertilizer

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's hotline number is 888-426-4435. (Note: Callers will be charged a consultation fee.)