

Pet Care Advice

Toxins and Poisons

All of the poisons mentioned here can, in high enough doses, be fatal.

Chocolate

The active ingredient in chocolate is called theobromine, and the effects it has on the body are similar to those of caffeine i.e. raised heart rate, excitability, progressing to tremors, seizures, weakness and ataxia (wobbliness). As an idea, the higher the cocoa content, the less needed to be toxic, so plain, dark chocolate is worse than milk chocolate.



Lilies

Another poisoning more commonly seen in cats is from the pollen of lilies, which leads to renal failure. It occurs as cats groom themselves, ingesting pollen which is on their fur following contact with the flowers.

Grapes and raisins

Ingestion of grapes and/or raisins leads to renal failure, although the amount that needs to be ingested to cause a problem varies greatly. Because of this, it is worth getting your dog checked even after eating a small amount – and this include things such as fruit cake and Christmas pudding.

Paracetamol and Ibuprofen

Paracetamol is toxic to both cats and dogs, although cats have a relatively lower toxic dose. It causes severe damage to the liver as well as damaging the red blood cells, causing anaemia.

Rat bait

Most rat baits use some form of anticoagulant as their active ingredient, and warfarin is the most common of these. They are designed to prevent blood clotting, so cause bleeding (internal or external). Rat bait poisoning can occur either by ingesting the poison directly, or a rodent who has been poisoned. Always tell your vet if you know there is rat bait down in your area – even if you do not think your pet can get to it.

Slug pellets

The active ingredient in slug bait is metaldehyde, and affects the central nervous system, causing seizures. Due to the colouration of slug bait, green-blue trace can often be seen in and around the mouth, as well as in vomit and faeces. Many alternative types of slug bait are available that are not toxic to animals.

Ethylene glycol

This is more commonly known as antifreeze. It is one of the few poisons that cats will ingest as it is sweet smelling and tasting. When broken down by the body, antifreeze causes crystals to form which lodge in the kidney, leading to renal failure.

Pyrethrin

This is a common insecticide found in many over-the-counter dog flea and tick preventative treatments. They are, however, toxic to cats, causing ataxia, tremors and seizures.

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Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory (NSAIDs)

These are a collection of commonly prescribed pain relieving drugs, which can be toxic when administered incorrectly at too high or frequent a dose. They can cause ulceration of the gastro-intestinal tract in milder cases, leading to anaemia and renal failure in worse cases. This collection of drugs includes aspirin and ibuprofen (previously mentioned).

Allium family

e.g. onions, garlic

Poisoning from these substances can cause damage to the red blood cells, potentially leading to reduced oxygen carrying capacity and anaemia.

What should I do if I suspect a poisoning?

Call your vet immediately and have the following information ready:

- Exact name of toxin ingested, inhaled, or absorbed if possible
- Approximately how much of the toxin was ingested
- How long ago you suspect that your pet may have been poisoned
- Approximate weight of your pet
- What signs your pet is showing



If you know what poison your pet has ingested, take the box or package with you to the vets – always call first so we are expecting you and can be prepared to begin treatment as soon as you arrive

Common signs seen in poisonings

- Vomiting and/or diarrhoea, sometimes with blood
- Excessive salivation – drooling or foaming
- Redness of skin, ears, eyes
- Ulceration or blisters of the mouth or skin
- Excessive pawing at the mouth, excessive licking
- Swelling (i.e. of a limb or face) commonly seen with insect bites or stings
- Muscle tremors or seizures
- Fast heart rate and pulse and/or increased rate of breathing (sometimes panting)

Interesting fact!

Cats are less likely to be poisoned than dogs due to something called the Jacobson's organ (or vomeronasal organ). This is found in the nose and allows them to taste their food through smell, therefore avoiding eating anything nasty. Other animals with a Jacobson's organ are horses and snakes.