

Common Household Poisons

- Many common food items or household products can sicken or even kill animals.
- Be aware of what substances may be toxic to your pet, and store and use them safely.
- If you think your pet has eaten something poisonous, call your veterinarian or an animal poison hotline immediately.

Top 10 Pet Poisons

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center handles more than 180,000 cases of pet poisonings every year. Based on those cases, the top 10 offenders are:

- Over-the counter medications
- Human prescription medications
- Insecticides
- Human foods
- Household items (e.g., cleaning products, fire logs, paints)
- Veterinary medications (e.g., wrong medication, wrong amount, wrong animal)
- Chocolate
- Plants
- Rodenticides
- Lawn and garden products

The Basics

Your home can hold a lot of unrecognized dangers for your pet. However, a few simple precautions can help keep your pet safe.

Pets are not “mini people.” Animals react to substances in food and medicines differently than people do, so just because something doesn’t make a person sick doesn’t mean it is okay for a pet. Also, most pets are much smaller than people, so what may seem like a harmless amount of a food or drug can make them ill.

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.



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Chocolate

If you suspect that your pet has consumed any amount of any chocolate, call your veterinarian. However, not all chocolate is equally dangerous to pets. In general, the darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is to animals. Baker’s chocolate and cocoa powder are the most dangerous because they contain the highest concentration of substances called *methylxanthines*. Pets that eat too much of these substances can have vomiting, diarrhea, excessive thirst and urination, hyperactivity, and in severe cases, increased heart rate, abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, and seizures.

Other Food

It is generally not a good idea to give your pet table food. Many human foods can cause digestive upset or pancreatitis, which can be severe. Even if the food is not known to be toxic, it can still contain mycotoxins, which are substances produced by mold that can cause neurologic signs. Also, several common ingredients in human food can be toxic to pets. Just a few are:

- Avocados
- Grapes and raisins. These are sometimes recommended as treats for dogs. However, cases of serious kidney damage have been reported in dogs, cats, and ferrets that consume them.
- Macadamia nuts
- Onions, garlic, and chives

Common Household Poisons *continued*

In an Emergency...

If your pet does eat something he or she shouldn't, time is critical. Call your veterinarian or an animal poison hotline immediately and be prepared to describe the following:

- What your pet ate
- How long ago
- How much

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's hotline number is **888-426-4435**. The Pet Poison Helpline number is **855-764-7661**. (Note: Callers will be charged a consultation fee.)

If possible, bring some of the substance, including any available packaging, with you if you are asked to bring your pet in for an examination.



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- Xylitol. This is a common sugar-free sweetener, often found in chewing gum, foods (including peanut butter), dental products, and medications and supplements. Xylitol can lower the blood sugar in the body and cause life-threatening liver failure.
- Yeast dough
- Some beverages, such as coffee and alcohol

In general, do not store or leave food meant for you and your family in a place where your pet may be able to get to it. Take special care during holiday seasons and festive occasions, when it is very easy to become distracted and leave food or drinks on a counter or coffee table.

Medicines

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

Cleaning Products

Read the warning labels on the household cleaning products you use, and store as directed.

Outdoor Hazards

If you have a garage, shed, or garden, you probably have at least some of the following:

- **Plants:** Learn 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/apcc).
- **Pest poisons:** Poisons meant to kill rodents, insects, or weeds are very common causes of poisoning in pets. Be very careful how you apply and store any poisons around your home.
- **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. ■