



## Pets and Poisons

Pets are naturally inquisitive and have a very powerful sense of smell. This means there is a danger that they will eat or come into contact with various poisons at home or outside. Some of the most common of these are described below.

### Rat or Mouse Poison

These are used to control rodent infestations and are one of the biggest hazards to dogs and cats. Pets can be poisoned by eating the bait (which is usually flavoured to make it attractive to the rodents) or by eating rodents that have already eaten the poison. Most of these poisons are anticoagulants which affect the blood causing bleeding which can be severe. Signs may not appear for several days.

### Ibuprofen, other anti-inflammatory drugs and paracetamol

We see a surprisingly large number of cases each year where a pet has eaten medication intended for their owners or visitors. These are usually 'stolen' from an owner's bag or have inadvertently been left on work surfaces. Dogs have been known to eat whole packs of tablets and even remove them from the blister packaging or 'child-proof' containers. Ibuprofen poisoning has been seen several times, probably because it is used so frequently in people and does appear to be very palatable to some dogs. Ibuprofen is particularly poisonous to pets and can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, gastric ulceration and kidney failure. We have also seen cases where pets have eaten large amounts of their own medication leading to an overdose. Some animals are very sensitive to paracetamol, especially cats, and even very small amounts can be harmful. Keep all medicines in locked cabinets which are out of reach of your pet. Also keep all handbags away from pets, and be very careful when you are visiting friends and relatives with your pet. Their home may not be as pet-proof as your own.

### Chocolate

Chocolate contains theobromine, a substance to which many animals are particularly sensitive. The amount of theobromine in chocolate varies depending on the quality or type of chocolate. Even a small amount of dark chocolate (which is very high in theobromine) can cause agitation, hyperexcitability, tremors, convulsions and problems with the heart.

### Permethrin

Permethrin is an insecticide found in some flea treatments available from shops. Cats are very sensitive to permethrin and can be poisoned if a treatment intended for a dog is accidentally used on a cat. A pet can also be cross-contaminated by close contact with a treated animal or by grooming (licking) a treated animal. Signs include excessive salivation, twitching, tremors and fitting. Always read instructions carefully and check you are using the correct product for that particular animal and following all the necessary precautions. Your vet can advise you on safe flea treatments which do not contain this chemical.

### Household and Garden Products

Slug bait containing metaldehyde is often used in the garden to kill slugs and is usually found as blue or green pellets. If eaten by a pet they cause muscle spasm, twitching and convulsions.

DIY materials should always be kept away from pets. White spirit is very poisonous to pets. Remember if animals get substances on their coat or feet they will try to groom and lick, causing further problems.

Antifreeze, containing ethylene glycol, is extremely poisonous to pets and causes kidney failure.

Keep all hazardous materials away from pets.

### Lillies

Many house and garden plants are poisonous but there have been a lot of reports about lilies recently. Lilies are very poisonous to cats and even a small exposure to the pollen (which gets onto the cat's coat as it brushes past the flowers and is then swallowed when grooming) can potentially be very dangerous to a cat. All parts of the plant are poisonous to cats and can cause kidney failure. Dogs can also be affected.

## Grapes, raisins and sultanas

The amount of these which can cause problems is very variable. Some dogs have gone into kidney failure after eating a small handful of raisins or grapes.

## Onions

Onions and garlic can be poisonous to pets causing anaemia (a blood disease).

## Xylitol

This food additive is used as an artificial sweetener and is found in some chewing gum, sweets and other products. It is very harmful to pets.

## Treatment

If you suspect your pet has eaten something harmful or poisonous contact your veterinary surgery immediately. It will be very helpful if you know the exact substance your pet has been exposed to, so keep any product packaging and take this with you to the vets. The important thing is not to delay, even if your pet is showing no symptoms or adverse effects. Many pets have eaten some of the above poisons and made a full recovery by receiving the correct treatment at a veterinary surgery. However all of the above poisons can potentially be fatal if not treated straight away.

### ***Always contact us for professional advice!***

The BVA have also produced a flyer [http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/awf\\_poisons\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/awf_poisons_leaflet.pdf) regarding poisons.