

COMMON HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS

CORNELL VETERINARY MEDICINE

Whether lazing on a cozy couch, stretching out in a spot in the sun, or exploring the dark corners of your closet, your cat feels safe in your home. But every household has substances that can pose a hazard to your cat if he's exposed to them. Learn about some of the common hazards around your home and ways you can protect your feline friends from harm.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK MY CAT HAS INGESTED SOMETHING TOXIC?

Call your veterinarian immediately. If your vet is not available, try a local emergency veterinary clinic or animal poison control help hotline.

Pet Poison Helpline: (855) 289-0358

ASPCA Animal Poison Control: (888) 426-4435

If you are aware of the toxin that your cat was exposed to, obtain a sample or a label to bring to the veterinarian or to provide information to a help hotline.

IMPORTANT: DO NOT induce vomiting unless you are specifically directed to do so. Certain poisons can cause more damage during vomiting than if left in the stomach.

SIGNS OF POISONING

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Seizures
- Blood in the stool/urine
- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Bruising
- Nosebleeds
- Irregular heartbeat
- Inability to urinate
- Difficulty breathing

HOW QUICKLY WILL MY CAT BECOME ILL?

This depends upon the toxin involved. By the time an owner recognizes a problem, a cat may be at significant risk for serious health problems. For this reason, a prompt veterinary consultation is essential.

PLANTS

Indoor and outdoor plants can pose a risk to your cat. Ingesting just a small piece of some common ornamental plants such as poinsettias could be enough to make a cat ill, and swallowing a sizable

amount could prove fatal. Lilies are especially toxic to cats; they can cause life-threatening kidney failure if ingested even in tiny amounts. Plants that are toxic for cats include (but are not limited to):

- Aloe Vera (Liliaceae)
- Amaryllises (Amaryllidinae)
- Azalea (Ericaceae)
- Baby's Breath (Gypsophila)
- Bird of Paradise (Strelitzia Reginae and Caesalpinia Gilliesii)
- Caladium (Caladium)
- Chrysanthemum (Compositae)
- Daffodils (Narcissus)
- Devil's Ivy (Epipremnum Aureum)
- Dieffenbachia (Dieffenbachia Amoena)
- Dumbcane (Dieffenbachia)
- Elephant's Ear (Alocasia)
- English Ivy (Hedera Helix)
- Foxgloves (Digitalis)
- Holly (Ilex)
- Hyacinth (Hyacinthus)
- Hydrangeas (Hydrangeaceae)
- Jade (Crassula)
- Kalanchoe (Kalanchoe Blossfeldiana)
- Lilies (Lilium)
- Mistletoe (Phoradendron)
- Moss Rose (Portulaca Oleracea)
- Oleander (Nerium Oleander)
- Parsley (Apiaceae)
- Philodendron (Philodendron)
- Poinsettia (Euphorbia)
- Pothos (Epipremnum Aureum)
- Sago Palm (Cycadaceae)
- Snake Plant (Sansevieria Trifasciata)
- Sweet William (Dianthus Barbatus)
- Tomato Plant (Solanaceae)
- Tulips (Liliaceae)
- Wisteria (Fabaceae)

MEDICATIONS

Human medications and flea treatments for dogs can be acutely toxic for cats. Remember: never give your cat medications without first consulting your veterinarian. Cats will often gobble up pills they find lying on tables or dropped on the floor, so be vigilant with your medications. Some common causes of poisoning include:

- Aspirin
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- Ibuprofen
- Dietary supplements (vitamins)

- Flea medication for dogs

HOUSEHOLD CHEMICALS

Many of the chemicals around your house can present a hazard for your feline friends. Keep these materials in a place your cats can't reach, and ensure any spills are cleaned up promptly. If you have an outdoor cat, take precautions when using these products in your yard.

- Pesticides
 - Insecticides
 - Rodenticides
- Garden products
 - Fertilizers
 - Weed killers
 - Molluscicides (snail baits and snail pellets)
- Miscellaneous products
 - Ethylene glycol antifreeze
 - Paint thinner
 - Swimming pool chemicals
 - Household cleaners (including bleach, detergents, and disinfectants)

TOXIC FOODS

It's tempting to give your beloved cat a treat of human food, but many of the things we enjoy are off-limits for our feline friends. These foods include (but are not limited to):

- Alcohol
- Avocados
- Chocolate
- Citrus
- Chives
- Coconut
- Garlic
- Grapes
- Milk and Cow Dairy
- Nuts
- Onions
- Raisins
- Raw Egg
- Salt
- Yeast
- Xylitol (artificial sweetener)

ESSENTIAL OILS

Essential oils are volatile, organic constituents of plants that contribute to fragrance and taste. They are extracted from plants via distillation or cold pressing. Essential oils are utilized in a variety of ways:

as insecticides, in aromatherapies, personal care products (e.g., antibacterials), flavorings, herbal remedies and liquid potpourri.

Essential oils can pose a toxic risk to household pets, especially to cats. They are rapidly absorbed both *orally* and across the *skin* and are then metabolized in the liver. Cats lack an essential enzyme in their liver and as such have difficulty metabolizing and eliminating certain toxins like essential oils. Cats are also very sensitive to phenols and phenolic compounds, which can be found in some essential oils. The higher the concentration of the essential oil (i.e. 100%), the greater the risk to the cat.

Essential oils that are known to cause poisoning in cats include oil of wintergreen, oil of sweet birch, citrus oil (d- limonene), pine oils, Ylang Ylang oil, peppermint oil, cinnamon oil, pennyroyal oil, clove oil, eucalyptus oil, and tea tree oil. Symptoms that develop depend on the type of oil involved in the exposure and can include drooling, vomiting, tremors, ataxia (wobbliness), respiratory distress, low heart rate, low body temperature, and liver failure.

Until recently, the use of essential oils for aromatherapy was restricted to such devices as candles, liquid potpourri products, room sprays, passive diffusers, or applying it to skin like perfume.

Passive diffusers work by evaporating the oil, producing a pleasant smell. Types include:

- Reed diffusers, where the reeds soak up the oil and disperse its fragrance into the air.
- Heat diffusers like plug-in/electric oil diffusers, candle burners, or table top warmers that use heat to evaporate the oil.
- Non-motorized, personal evaporative diffusers (necklace pendants, bracelets, etc.) that use room air currents to diffuse the aroma.
- Motorized diffusers that use a fan to blow air through a filter or pad that has been permeated with an essential oil.

Unless the oil in a passive diffuser gets onto a cat's skin or is ingested in some way (e.g. the diffuser tips over onto or near the cat, or the cat ingests a personal diffuser), the main hazard to cats from essential oils dispersed through passive diffusers is respiratory irritation.

Inhalation of strong odors or fragrances can cause some cats to develop a watery nose or eyes, a burning sensation in the nose/throat, nausea leading to drooling and/or vomiting, and difficulty breathing. Difficulty breathing in a cat is evidenced by labored breathing, fast breathing, panting, coughing, or wheezing. NONE of these signs are normal in cats. A coughing episode in a cat can be mistaken by owners for the cat trying to vomit up a hairball. However, in this case the cat crouches low to the ground, with little to no abdominal movement that is more typical of vomiting. No hairball is produced.

Cats suffering such symptoms need to be moved immediately into fresh air, and require emergency veterinary treatment should their symptoms not quickly resolve once they are in fresh air. Cats with pre-existing respiratory issues such as asthma, airborne allergies, or cats exposed to second hand smoke from their human companions, are at greater risk for developing severe respiratory irritation than cats without such conditions.

Recently, active essential oil diffusers have hit the market. The active diffusers differ from passive ones in that actual microdroplets or particles of oil are emitted into the air in addition to the pleasant

aroma of the oil. Nebulizing diffusers (pressurized high-speed air stream and an atomizing nozzle) and ultrasonic diffusers (electric current causes an instrument to emit a vibration) fall into this category.

The droplets dispersed by these new diffusers may be small, but they still pose a risk to cats. Depending on how close the cat is to the dispenser, the essential oil microdroplets may collect on the cat's fur if it is the same room as the active diffuser. The oil can be either absorbed directly through the skin, or ingested when the cat grooms itself.

Drooling, vomiting, tremors, ataxia (wobbliness), respiratory distress, low heart rate, low body temperature, and liver failure can potentially develop depending on the type of essential oil that was used and the dose that the cat was exposed to.

Like oil and water, essential oils and cats really do not mix. Owners should be cautious using essential oils and diffusers in their homes in order to protect their cat(s) from a toxic risk. Most importantly, concentrated essential oils should never be directly applied to cats.

The following essential oils are poisonous to cats:

- Cinnamon oil
- Citrus oil
- Clove oil
- Eucalyptus oil
- Lavender oil
- Oregano oil
- Pennyroyal oil
- Peppermint oil
- Pine oil
- Sweet Birch oil
- Tea Tree oil
- Wintergreen oil
- Ylang Ylang oil

STRING CAN KILL

If ingested, string, thread, ribbon, yarn, etc. can cause life-threatening intestinal issues in cats. Keep your cats safe:

- Never leave string where your cat can get it.
- Never leave your cat alone with toys that have string or yarn.
- If you suspect your cat has swallowed string, call your vet immediately.
- Never pull on a string dangling from your cat's mouth or anus. If you see this, take your cat to the emergency vet immediately.

LOOK BEFORE YOU LOCK

It may seem strange, but some cats like to hang out inside the washer or dryer. Some cats like the coldness of the refrigerator or freezer. Curious cats might crawl into a cabinet. Be sure you keep your kitty safe by looking before starting your laundry, closing the refrigerator, or locking a cabinet door.

HOUSEHOLD SAFETY CHECKLIST INSIDE THE HOME

- All doors, including patio entrances, are closed.
- Pet doors are the right size and close properly.
- Dangerous food, such as chocolate, is out of reach.
- Medication, dietary supplements and antibiotics are safely out of reach.
- All the garbage in the house is secure and inaccessible.
- All cleaning supplies are out of reach.
- All dangerous objects are off the floor and out of reach.
- Toilet bowl lid is closed, and no sanitizing flush products are in use.
- All sharp objects that might cut your cat's paws or mouth are put away.
- Childproof latches are on all cabinets containing hazardous substances so your cat can't 'slip' the latch.
- Poisonous plants have been cat-proofed or placed where your cat can't get them.
- Toys that could be dangerous if swallowed have been picked up.
- Pesticides have been placed out of reach or replaced with nontoxic substances.
- Hot stoves are covered and sharp items on kitchen counters are put away.
- Your cat has toys to chew on to help prevent chewing on electrical wiring or other dangerous objects.