

# 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 a pet poison hotline immediately.



## **The Basics**

Your home can hold a lot of unrecognized dangers for your pet. Many common food items or household products can sicken or even kill animals. However, a few simple precautions can help keep your pet safe.

Pets are not “mini people.” Animals react to substances in food and medicines completely 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.

## **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 is the most dangerous because it contains the highest concentration of a substance 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.

## **Other Food**

It is generally not a good idea to give your pet table food. Many human foods can cause digestive upset, which can be severe. Also, several common ingredients in human food can be toxic to pets. Just a few are:

- Avocados
- Grapes and raisins
- Macadamia nuts
- Onions, garlic, and chives
- Xylitol (a common sugar-free sweetener, often found in chewing gum and commercial baked goods, that can cause life-threatening liver failure)
- Yeast dough

Some beverages, such as coffee and alcohol, can also be poisonous to pets.

Grapes are sometimes recommended as treats for dogs; however, cases of serious kidney damage related to eating grapes have been reported. Raisins have also been reported to be toxic to dogs.

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 (<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/poison-control/>).
- **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.

## **In an Emergency...**

If your pet does eat something he or she shouldn't, time is critical. Call your veterinarian or a pet 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 800-213-6680. (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.

## **Top 10 Pet Poisons**

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center handles more than 100,000 cases of pet poisonings every year. Based on those cases, the top offenders are:

- Human medicines
- Insecticides
- Human 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

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