

Common household poisons and cats

Cats are usually very sensible creatures when it comes to eating things which are not good for them. So why do vets have to deal with cats which have ingested something harmful?

A LARGE PART of the answer lies in the fact that cats like to keep themselves scrupulously clean and will groom off anything on their coats or paws which shouldn't be there. Hence they can swallow things like antifreeze or decorating products, which they have walked through or brushed against.

Cats also like to nibble at grass outside. If they do not have access to this because they are indoor cats or simply because they are young and inquisitive, they may chew indoor plants or cut flowers such as lilies.

Here are some of the more dangerous poisons which cat owners should be aware of:

Paracetamol

- Often given to cats in a caring but misguided attempt to relieve pain.
- Highly dangerous for cats - just one tablet is enough to cause severe illness or death.
- Signs of poisoning include depression, vomiting, swelling of the face and paws and a bluish discolouration of the skin.
- An effective antidote is available, but must be used very soon after the cat has taken the tablet.
- **NEVER GIVE CATS PRODUCTS INTENDED FOR PEOPLE** (unless instructed otherwise by your vet)

Lilies

- Cats are very sensitive to plants of the Liliaceae species, including Easter, Stargazer, Tiger and Asiatic lilies.
- All parts of a lily are toxic, even the flowers and pollen (which can be groomed off its coat if the cat brushes past the flowers). Less than one leaf ingested by a cat can cause kidney failure.
- Signs to look for are prolonged vomiting, not eating and depression.
- Urgent veterinary treatment is required.
- **CHECK FLOWER LABELS FOR WARNINGS OF TOXICITY TO ANIMALS**

All parts of the lily are toxic to cats



Garden World Images/E. Welch

Antifreeze used in cars

- Often contains ethylene glycol or methanol, which are toxic to cats. These chemicals can also be found in car screenwashes and de-icers.
- They can cause weakness, hypothermia, breathing difficulties, convulsions and kidney damage.
- Treatment can be difficult and is rarely successful.
- **CLEAN UP ANY SPILLAGES CAREFULLY AND KEEP CATS AWAY**

Certain dog flea products

- Permethrin is found in many spot-on preparations for dogs used for the control of fleas, biting flies and lice. (It is also the active ingredient in some ant powders).
- Poisoning can arise when cats are accidentally treated with such dog flea products or where they groom themselves or other animals treated with the product.
- Cats may salivate a great deal, be thirsty, have a high temperature and tremors or convulsions.
- Urgent veterinary advice is essential.
- **NEVER USE DOG PRODUCTS ON CATS** (unless instructed otherwise by your vet)

Some slug baits

- Metaldehyde is the problem ingredient in some slug baits and any amount can be toxic for a cat.
- Cats may become unsteady on their legs, salivate and twitch and can suffer convulsions.
- Signs of poisoning develop quickly so urgent treatment is needed.
- **AVOID PRODUCTS CONTAINING METALDEHYDE IF YOU HAVE PETS**

Decorating materials

- Petroleum distillates found in solvents for paints, glass cleaners, varnishes, wood preservatives (such as creosote) and brush cleaners (eg, white spirit), can all cause problems.
- They are irritants to the skin and footpads causing inflammation, blisters and burning. If the cat then grooms the product off the skin there may be severe irritation to its mouth.
- Fumes from the products may also cause breathing difficulties.
- **CLEAN UP ANY SPILLAGES CAREFULLY AND KEEP CATS AWAY**

This leaflet highlights some of the more serious potential poisons for cats. A list of plants poisonous to cats and further information can be found on www.fabcats.org.

Tips list

What to do if you think your cat has been poisoned

- Remove your cat from the source of poison and isolate from other animals.
- If possible prevent the cat from grooming itself further.
- Contact your vet for advice immediately; make sure you know when, where and how the poisoning occurred. If appropriate take the packaging, plant or substance with you to the vet.
- Do not try to make the cat vomit, unless you are instructed to do so by your vet.
- If the skin or fur is contaminated wash thoroughly with mild shampoo and water.

This leaflet is a collaborative initiative between FAB and the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS). The VPIS



offers advice and information to veterinary professionals to assist in the treatment of animals exposed to toxic substances (it is not a public access service). Your practice may be a member of the VPIS which can provide vets with help 24 hours a day.

www.fabcats.org

FAB's full range of Cat Friendly Practice leaflets

Bringing your cat to the vet
Giving medicine to your cat
Feeding a poorly cat
Your cat is having an operation
Preventing health problems
Insuring your cat
Choosing a boarding cattery
Common household poisons and cats
Why do cats..?

For more information on cat care
www.fabcats.org

The Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB)

Set up almost 50 years ago, FAB's work now provides essential information for cat owners and expert information for people working with cats such as veterinary surgeons, breeders, cattery owners and rescue centres. Through our feline expert panel (a group of veterinary surgeons funded by FAB to specialise in feline care at UK veterinary universities) FAB has gathered a wealth of information on both common and rare conditions.

We're not just interested in veterinary treatment; our experts understand that a cat's home environment and lifestyle can have a huge influence on its health and well being. FAB is interested in the whole cat! The more owners understand cats and their behaviour the better they will be at spotting problems and giving TLC when a cat needs it most.

For over 400 pages of information on cat care go to FAB's website. We're already helping over 1 million cat owners a year.

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