

Common Household Poisons

Home, Toxic Home!

Home is the place where we feel the most safe. However, for the four-footed members of your family, your home can also hold a lot of unrecognized dangers. For instance, did you know that many common food items or household products can sicken or even kill pets? Don't panic! A few simple precautions can help keep your pet safe.

Frightening Foods

You probably know that chocolate can be poisonous to pets, but what about grapes, raisins, onions, garlic, macadamia nuts, avocados, coffee, alcohol, yeast, and the common sugar-free sweetener, xylitol (often found in chewing gum and baked goods)? All of these items can also be dangerous to pets, so it's important not to give them to your pet as treats or to store them or leave them out where your pet



Store all chemicals out of reach of your pet, just as you would for children.

may be able to get to them. Take special care during holiday seasons and festive occasions. It is all too easy to start cooking and forget that you left a package of baker's chocolate on the counter, or to start socializing with guests and leave an alcoholic drink on a coffee table.

Even food that isn't actually poisonous can be a problem. Many people foods are too fatty for pets and can cause digestive upset, which can be severe. It's generally not a good idea to give your pet table food as a treat.

Sweets That Are Not So Sweet

If you suspect that your pet has consumed any amount of any chocolate, you should call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's hotline (888-426-4435). However, not all chocolates are equally dangerous to pets. In general, the darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is to animals. Baker's chocolate is the most dangerous of all because it contains the highest concentration of the responsible chemical, 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.

Another "sweet" substance of growing concern is xylitol. This is an artificial sweetener that is found in many sugar-free items, such as candy, gum, beverages, and desserts. It can be very toxic to pets, causing life-threatening liver failure in some cases.

Pets Are Not "Mini People"

It's important to keep in mind that pets are not "mini people." They react to substances in food and medicines completely differently than we do, so just because something doesn't make us sick doesn't mean it is okay for our pets. Also, pets are generally much smaller than people, so what we might think is a tiny, harmless amount of a food or drug can make them ill.

For these reasons, you should 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 be careful to pick up any dropped pills immediately. Use the same caution with dietary supplements or with products you buy at the health-food store.