

## The 'Cute' Little Habit That Can Sicken Your Pet – Or Worse

Many pet owners think this habit is endearing and harmless, but don't realize it can damage their pet's GI tract and cause vomiting, diarrhea, stomach ulcers, and even potentially heart or kidney failure. Even though your pet may love doing it, please don't let him.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many dogs and even some cats have a thing about licking their humans right after they apply lotion or a medicated cream to their skin
- This presumably harmless habit can actually cause big problems depending on what you've rubbed on, that your pet has licked off
- There are many types of lotions, ointments, creams, and topical medications that can make your pet sick, or even desperately ill, if ingested, including several you might not suspect
- To be on the safe side, it's best to consistently discourage this type of licking so that no matter the situation, your pet won't be tempted
- If you suspect your pet has ingested a potentially harmful topical product, call your veterinarian or an emergency animal hospital right away

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For some reason, many dogs and even cats enjoy licking lotions and other types of topical products off their human's skin. In fact, one of my dogs tends to wait by the bathroom door, hoping he'll get a chance to sample whatever I've applied to my skin after my shower. (That's one of the reasons I use all organic body products.) And dogs seem especially intent on having a lick if the product has a yummy smell, for example, vanilla scented body lotion or coconut oil-based products.

Unfortunately, this seemingly harmless little habit so many pets indulge in can be cause for concern depending on what you've put on your skin. The following are products you definitely don't want your dog, cat, bird, or other animal companion licking off you and ingesting.

### Over-the-Counter Topical Products Dangerous to Pets

- **Personal care products** — The majority of personal care products, including soaps and body washes, toothpastes, moisturizing lotions, sunscreens, self-tanners, shampoos, conditioners, deodorants, antiperspirants, make-up, and other cosmetics, contain potentially toxic chemicals. Not only can they cause GI upset if ingested by your pet, they can also affect your own health.
- **Creams containing hydrocortisone** — These are steroid-based formulations typically used to control itching. If your pet ingests a product containing hydrocortisone, it can cause increased thirst and urination,

panting, vomiting and diarrhea.

- **Ointments, lotions and creams containing antibiotics** — Commonly called "triple-antibiotic" products, these are applied to cuts, scrapes, scratches, and other types of breaks in the skin. If ingested by your pet, they can cause stomach upset.
- **Antifungal creams** — These are used to treat athlete's foot, vaginal yeast infections, "jock itch," and nail fungus. They can cause vomiting and diarrhea if ingested by your pet.
- **Products containing zinc oxide** — These are typically diaper rash ointments and creams, and calamine lotion used to treat poison ivy. Zinc oxide can cause vomiting and diarrhea in dogs. Bloody vomit or diarrhea should prompt a call to your veterinarian, since it indicates the zinc oxide has damaged your pet's GI tract, potentially requiring treatment.
- **Muscle rub creams** — Many of these products contain salicylates, which are aspirin-like compounds that if ingested by your pet can cause vomiting with or without blood, as well as stomach ulcers. Some muscle rub products may contain other problem ingredients, like menthol or capsaicin, which is an active component of chili peppers.
- **Minoxidil, brand name Rogaine** — This is a hair regrowth product, but its original use was as a blood pressure medication. Pets who ingest minoxidil can show initial symptoms of vomiting and lethargy, progressing to a build-up of fluid in the lungs, and ultimately, heart failure. Certainly you'll want to keep your pet a safe distance away if you have this product in your home.

## Prescription Topical Products Dangerous to Pets

- **Prescription steroid-based creams** — These are typically prescribed for itchy skin conditions when over-the-counter products aren't working. Common topical steroids include betamethasone, clobetasone, clobetasol, hydrocortisone, methylprednisone, mometasone, and triamcinolone. If ingested, these products can cause the same symptoms in your pet as OTC preparations (increased thirst and urination, panting, vomiting, and diarrhea), but for a longer period of time.
- **Hormone creams** — Topical creams containing hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, or testosterone can be absorbed through your pet's skin in addition to being ingested. These compounds are endocrine disruptors that can cause changes such as mammary gland enlargement, and in sterilized females, signs of estrus and false pregnancy.
- **Anti-inflammatory pain medication creams** — These compounded creams (Flurbiprofen is a common one) are typically prescribed for topical relief of arthritis. Just a tiny ingested amount of Flurbiprofen can cause kidney failure in cats.
- **Vitamin A compounds** — These are called retinoids, and they're prescribed to treat acne. Ingestion by a pet can cause stomach upset and in pregnant animals, birth defects in developing fetuses.
- **Calcipotriene, brand name Dovonex** — This is a prescription ointment containing vitamin D used to treat psoriasis. Just a small amount of this ointment can be fatal to both dogs and cats; it also causes vomiting and kidney failure.
- **5-fluorouracil, brand names 5-FU and Efudex** — This prescription lotion is used to treat a condition called solar keratosis, which is precancerous sun damage, as well as skin cancer in humans. If ingested by your pet, it can cause uncontrollable seizures, bloody vomiting, and diarrhea, and bone marrow suppression. This is an incredibly dangerous product to use around animals, as the majority who ingest it cannot be saved.

## 5 Tips for Keeping Your Pet Safe from Topical Products

1. Prevent your pet from licking after you've applied any product to your skin. Even if you use primarily organic, nontoxic products, it's best to consistently discourage licking to keep your pet safe in all situations.
2. Allow all topical products to dry or soak in completely — or cover the area of application — before having contact with your pet.
3. Never apply a topical product meant for humans to your pet without first talking with your veterinarian.
4. After applying any topical drug, over-the-counter or prescription, wash your hands thoroughly before handling your pet. Store all such products well away from your pet.
5. Contact your vet or an emergency veterinary clinic immediately if you suspect your pet may have ingested or come in contact with a potentially harmful topical product.

### Sources and References

[VetStreet October 6, 2014](#)

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