

Are You Unwittingly Poisoning Your Pet?

If you do this daily or weekly activity as many pet owners do, you may be doing just that. If you share your home with one or more beloved pets, be sure to take a close look at your routine to make sure you're not creating a toxic environment that can severely injure your pet.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most pet parents do more housecleaning than is typical, because living with animal companions means dealing with lots of pet hair, drool deposits, and other messes
- Since we do so much cleaning, for the sake of our furry family members, it's important not to load up our indoor environment with potentially toxic cleaning chemicals
- The good news is there are inexpensive, nontoxic, homemade cleaning solutions that can handle a wide variety of jobs just as effectively as chemical cleaning agents
- If you're using commercial "green" household cleaners, it's important to know how safe they really are for households with pets

Most of us with pets in the family have consciously and quite happily traded a pristine living environment for the privilege of sharing our hearts and homes with our **animal companions**.

Ironically, we actually tend to do more cleaning than people without pets to keep our living spaces reasonably free of gobs of pet hair, dried drool drips, paw prints, tracked litter, and all the other little messes our dogs and cats leave behind.

Is Your Cleaning Routine Risking Your Pet's Health?

If you're a cleanliness-minded pet parent, you might not realize most commercial cleaning products pollute the air inside your home by off-gassing toxic fumes that can be very hazardous, not to mention irritating, to everyone in the household. And the more cleaning you do, the greater the buildup of toxins in the indoor air.

Common symptoms of irritation from cleaning product fumes include eye irritation and **breathing problems**. If your dog licks the floor occasionally, he's ingesting small amounts of whatever floor cleaner you use. Your pets also walk around on the floor, lie on it, and lick their fur and paws, which is another way they can ingest cleaning chemicals.

Does your dog drink out of the toilet? Toilet bowl cleaners are among the most toxic for pets, especially the kind that clip to the edge of the toilet or sit in the tank, because their purpose is to deliver a constant level of chemicals to the toilet water. These caustic agents can burn your dog's mouth and throat, at a minimum.

Traditional cleaning agents can contain toxins such as bleach, ammonia, chlorine, phenol, isopropyl alcohol, and formaldehyde, all of which are potentially harmful to your pet. Symptoms of ingestion include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, seizures, coma, and in severe cases, death. If your pet gets a caustic substance on his body, it can cause a rash or a burn on his skin.

Many popular cleaners these days also contain antibacterial substances that are not only unnecessary but can actually help bacteria mutate and become resistant to killing agents.

Nontoxic, Inexpensive Household Cleaners

Replacing chemical household cleaners with a few simple, inexpensive, and nontoxic agents will lighten the **toxic load** of everyone under your roof, including your pet.

1. **Kitchens and bathrooms** — For cleaning and disinfecting kitchen and bathroom surfaces, dust with baking soda, then wipe with a moist cloth or sponge. For tough grime, add some salt and scrub it away.

To tackle grease, mildew, or other stains, spray the area with either lemon juice or water. Let it sit for a few minutes, and then scrub with a stiff cleaning brush.

If you need to disinfect a surface, an effective homemade solution is a mixture of 2 cups water, 3 tablespoons of liquid soap, and about 25 drops of tea tree oil, which is naturally antibacterial and antifungal.

2. **Unclogging a drain** — If you have a sink or tub clogged with pet hair or other gunk, it's a good idea to avoid caustic chemicals and drain cleaners as much as possible. I recommend pouring half a cup of baking soda in the drain, followed by 2 cups of boiling water.

If you have a really tough clog, you can follow the baking soda with a half-cup of vinegar. Close or cover the drain tightly while the soda-vinegar mixture is bubbling up and breaking up the clog. Once the fizzing stops, flush the drain with a gallon of boiling water.

3. **Windows and mirrors** — You don't need ammonia-based products to clean windows and mirrors around your home. Instead, use a mixture of 4 tablespoons lemon juice and a half gallon of water.

Also consider using clean lint-free cloth rather than paper products to wipe surfaces clean. Sometimes old, cotton t-shirts or cloth diapers also work really well for windows and other glass surfaces.

4. **Bare floors** — If you have wood, ceramic, linoleum, or vinyl flooring, you can use a vinegar and water solution instead of a chemical floor cleaner. Since pets are so low to the ground, this is an especially important tip. I recommend adding one cup of vinegar to one gallon of warm water to mop the floor.

There's no need to saturate the floor while mopping. Go easy and let the vinegar and water mixture do all the work. And there's really no need to rinse, but if you find the floor has a dull appearance after it dries, you can mop again with straight club soda to add a nice shine.

To remove stains on your vinyl floor, dip a clean cloth in full-strength lemon juice and rub it into the stain.

5. **Wood furniture** — Most store-bought furniture polish contains petroleum products that are toxic. Furniture polish sprays pollute the air with potentially hazardous chemicals that everyone in your home breathes into their lungs, including four-legged family members.

Instead, try a mixture of olive oil and lemon juice. Use 2 parts olive oil to 1 part lemon juice. Apply it to your furniture with a soft cloth, and then do a final polish with a second clean cloth.

You can also use **coconut oil** on wood furniture, but this doesn't work so well if your pets love the stuff and follow you around like mine do, licking it off as fast as I put it on!

This is by no means a complete list of all the ways you can reduce or even eliminate the chemical cleaners in your home, but it's an excellent start.

A Word of Caution About Commercial 'Green' Cleaners

Many commercially available green cleaning products are thought to be safe for animals, but if you're going to use them, I recommend employing the same precautions you would with chemical cleaners. For example:

- Keep your pet out of areas where cleaning agents are being used
- Don't spray or apply cleansers on or near your pet
- Don't allow your dog or cat to lick freshly cleaned surfaces or chew on sponges or cloths used for cleaning

Keep in mind there are countless meanings of the word "green," so it's important to do your homework to determine which products best suit your needs. Cleaners can be labeled "green" but still contain toxins, just at lower levels than similar products.

Also, some products labeled "green" or "natural" are neither, so it's up to you as a concerned pet parent to educate yourself on which cleaner ingredients are truly nontoxic and which pose a risk.

Once you've found natural products you're comfortable with, don't combine them with chemical cleaners such as ammonia or bleach, as noxious volatile organic compounds can result.

Additional Tips

When you launder pet items like bedding or soft toys, don't use fabric softener sheets containing cationic detergents (chemical soap that kills bacteria). In fact, any detergent, soap or other cleaner that has a strong scent is likely to contain chemicals that can make your pet sick.

It's a good idea to bathe your dog or cat with an **all-natural pet shampoo** and conditioner rather than products containing chemicals and heavy scents. If you take your pet to a groomer, you can either request they use an all-natural shampoo or bring your own, and let them know you want no scented products applied to your pet's skin or coat.

It's not unusual for a sensitive pet to return from a grooming appointment with very itchy, irritated skin as the result of the use of harsh or heavily scented products.

Sources and References