

Is Your Pet's Favorite Toy a Hidden Health Risk?

Human studies have demonstrated that these tiny particles have a negative impact on health, which means, they affect your pet's well-being, too.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet toys release harmful particles that cause various health issues in animals, such as thyroid dysfunction, weakened immune systems, heart problems, vision loss, and bone weakness
- Chemicals such as phthalates and BPA in plastic toys can leach into pets' gums, stomachs, and skin during play, mimicking hormones and disrupting their endocrine systems
- Pets face higher exposure than humans, as they're closer to the ground, breathing in and ingesting microplastics from household dust through grooming and play
- Canned pet food significantly increases BPA exposure, with research showing a threefold increase in dogs after just two weeks of consumption
- Reduce pet plastic exposure by filtering water, choosing eco-friendly toys, avoiding canned food, using stainless steel bowls, and selecting plastic-free packaging

Play time is one of the best ways to bond with your beloved pet. To help enhance the experience, buy new toys regularly as old ones get broken. While it's heartwarming to watch your pet enjoying the things you buy for them, pet parents don't often think about what the items are made from. More often than not, they contain a dangerous synthetic material — plastic.

The Impact of Plastic on Pet Health

Humans are exposed to plastic everyday, from the remote control of your TV to the containers storing your items. However, it's not just you who is exposed to plastic — your pet is also affected. Over time, plastic sheds small particles that eventually end up in both your body and your pet's body, causing various health issues. As noted by [EarthDay.org](#):¹

"Plastics and synthetic materials, like polyester and nylon, are present in many household items, like our couches, kitchen materials, nicknacks, and more. They shed microplastics and microfibers into the air which then become part of household dust, which pets frequently breath in and ingest through grooming and play. Being closer to the ground than humans, pets are at a higher risk of exposure to these harmful substances.

Research has already shown that toxic flame retardant chemicals are present in the blood of dogs and cats and are associated with thyroid issues, weakening our pets' immune systems which can cause more serious health issues such as heart problems, vision loss, and weak bones."

Analyzing the Plastics Lurking in Pet Toys

One of the biggest sources of plastic exposure in pets is the toys they play with. Because pets often touch, bite, chew, and carry these items in their mouths, they're likely ingesting chemicals from products that may seem harmless:²

"The toys that our pets chew on may also contain harmful chemicals. When buying our pets' toys, we often think of their fun and not their health. Plastic additives like phthalates and bisphenol-A (BPA) are common in many pet toys, leaching into pets' gums, stomachs, and skin," EarthDay.org explains.

"Given that pets frequently chew and play with these items, they are directly ingesting these dangerous substances, which could lead to long-term health issues."

For those unfamiliar, BPA is an industrial chemical used in various household products, including baby bottles, consumer electronics, and sports gear. Other ubiquitous items that contain BPA include thermal paper, store receipts, DVDs and CDs, dental devices, and eyeglass lenses.

One of the noteworthy properties of BPA is its ability to imitate hormones, especially estrogen, which are damaging to the health of both pet parents and their furry family members. According to a study conducted by researchers at the University of Missouri, the most common route of BPA exposure is through the diet, affecting both humans and animals. Specifically, they noted that just two weeks of feeding canned dog food resulted in a threefold increase in BPA for test dogs.³

Meanwhile, phthalates are found in PVC plastics, which subsequently leach into food and air. Research shows that it affects the reproductive health of both animals and humans by disrupting the endocrine system, as well as thyroid function.⁴

Now, which products contain phthalates? Common examples include air fresheners, candles, incense, and other scented products. Children and pet toys, as well as perfumes, also contain this toxic compound. Exposure occurs when it comes into contact with skin or is inhaled into the lungs.

7 Ways to Lower Plastic Exposure for Your Pet

Taking all the published research into consideration, it's clear that plastics, as well as microplastics, pose a significant health threat to your pet. Therefore, the most obvious strategy is to minimize exposure as much as possible. The operative word here is "minimize," as total avoidance is unrealistic. That said, changing certain habits can significantly reduce your pet's exposure. Here are some strategies:⁵

1. **Filter your tap water** — Tap water likely contains plastics, as well as other chemicals that may harm your pet's health. Invest in a high-quality water filter, as this not only benefits your pet but also your entire household.
2. **Choose safer toys** — Keep your eyes open for toys that contain eco-friendly materials, as these will be safer for your pet to chew and play with.
3. **Review your pet food** — If you're purchasing canned food for your pet, it's time to move away from it and switch to a homemade, species-appropriate diet. Canned food is usually lined with BPA, which affects hormonal health.

- 4. **Switch to stainless steel bowls** — In relation to the previous point, be sure to switch your plastic containers to stainless steel. While plastic is convenient, the risks far outweigh the benefits.
- 5. **Talk to food producers directly** — Engage with your local farmers and ranchers, to get food with minimal processing. If possible, bring your own plastic-free containers when buying from them to minimize exposure further.
- 6. **Scrutinize the packaging** — While you’re shopping for other accessories, toys, beds, or food, take a moment to review the packaging. Instead of going for those wrapped in plastic, choose glass or other eco-friendly containers.
- 7. **Spread the word** — While avoiding plastic exposure can be done at home, real change can be seen once more people adopt this habit. When more pet parents start shunning plastics, companies will take notice and be compelled to make positive changes that can have a more positive impact on both animals and humans.

Sources and References

^{1,2} [EarthDay.org](#), April 11, 2025

³ [Science of the Total Environment](#), Volume 579, 1 February 2017, Pages 1804-1814.

⁴ [Animals \(Basel\)](#), 2023 Jan 22;13(3):378

⁵ [Animal Wellness Magazine](#), April 4, 2025
