

# Keeping Curious Noses Safe at Home

Numerous substances inside your house can be hazardous to your pet if ingested or inhaled. If you want your four-legged family member to live a long, healthy life, this is a must-read.

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Every year, thousands of pets suffer from accidental poisoning at home. Many everyday items — foods, medications, and chemical cleaners — can be life-threatening to curious companions
- Common foods such as chocolate, grapes, onions, and xylitol-containing foods are toxic to pets. Even tiny amounts can lead to serious health issues or death
- Human drugs and household chemicals, including ibuprofen, Tylenol, bleach, and antifreeze, can poison your pet fast. Keep them locked away and never self-medicate your pet
- Vomiting, drooling, pale gums, or acting off may signal poisoning. Knowing these red flags can save your pet's life when every second counts
- Secure meds, choose pet-safe plants, and clean up spills fast. These simple steps can keep your furry friend out of danger and in your arms longer

Poisoning is one of the leading dangers to pets, and it's more common than you might think. Every year, thousands of dogs and cats end up at the vet because they've gotten into something they shouldn't have. The scary part? Most of these accidents happen right at home.

With the proper knowledge and a few smart steps, you can help make sure your furry companion stays safe. This article will discuss how to make your home poison-proof, identify substances to watch out for, recognize signs of poisoning, and provide guidance on what to do in an emergency.

## Why Poison Prevention Matters

Poisoning is a top cause of pet injuries and deaths in the U.S. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), its Animal Poison Control Center received 401,550 calls in 2021 alone.<sup>1</sup> And those are just the reported cases — many more likely go unnoticed or unrecorded.

The truth is, many everyday items in your home may seem harmless to you, but they can be extremely dangerous to your pet. Medications, certain foods, houseplants, cleaning supplies, and even items in your yard could all cause serious illness or worse, death. That's why it's crucial to understand the risks and take action before a problem occurs.

## Top Poisons Found in Most Homes

Not all pets react the same way to toxic substances. But some everyday items are hazardous to both dogs and cats. For example, some foods that are healthy for you can be deadly for your pet. Here are several common culprits:<sup>2</sup>

- **Chocolate** — Toxic to both cats and dogs. The darker the chocolate, the more dangerous it is.
- **Xylitol** — A sugar substitute found in candy, gum, baked goods, and some peanut butters. It can cause low blood sugar and liver failure in dogs.
- **Foods and drinks with caffeine** — It can overstimulate the central nervous system and heart muscle.
- **Grapes and raisins** — Even small amounts can lead to kidney failure in dogs.
- **Onions** — Whether raw, cooked, or powdered, they can damage red blood cells.
- **Macadamia nuts and alcohol** — Both are highly toxic and can cause severe reactions in pets.

Human medications are another leading cause of pet poisoning. Even a small dose can be harmful to your dog or cat.

- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** can cause stomach ulcers, kidney failure, and seizures.
- **Acetaminophen (Tylenol)** is especially deadly to cats, even in small amounts.
- **Antidepressants, ADD/ADHD medications, and antianxiety drugs** can affect the nervous system and heart.<sup>3</sup>
- **Vitamin D supplements**, when taken in very high doses, can lead to kidney damage.<sup>4</sup>

Never give your pet any medication without first consulting your veterinarian, and always keep pills, tablets, and supplements out of reach.

## Household Cleaners and Chemicals

Your cleaning supplies may help keep your home fresh, but they can be a nightmare for your pet. Bleach, ammonia, and disinfectants can cause chemical burns, vomiting, and respiratory problems.

Rodent poisons (rat and mouse bait) are hazardous because they're designed to kill. Slug, snail, and ant bait can be tempting for curious pets but are highly toxic.<sup>5</sup>

Another dangerous chemical your pet may be exposed to is antifreeze. Just a few drops can be deadly to dogs and cats. According to PetMD, ingesting even less than a half teaspoon per pound of your pet's body weight can be fatal.<sup>6</sup>

Ideally, store all cleaning and chemical products in closed cabinets or on high shelves, far out of reach. It's also essential to consider switching to nontoxic cleaners, such as vinegar and baking soda.

## Indoor Plants and Flowers Can Be Toxic to Pets

Your lovely houseplants and garden blooms might be more harmful than they look. Lilies are highly toxic to cats. Just licking pollen or chewing a leaf can lead to kidney failure. Aloe vera, jade plant, and sago palm are also dangerous to both cats and dogs.<sup>7</sup>

Before bringing any new plant home, double-check that it's pet-safe. And if you're unsure, keep it out of reach. When ingested, they can lead to gastrointestinal upset and vomiting; however, some plants can be more damaging.<sup>8</sup>

## How to Spot the Signs of Poisoning

Sometimes pets get into trouble despite our best efforts. The sooner you recognize the signs of poisoning, the better your vet's chance of helping. If you spot these symptoms, watch for and bring them to the vet immediately:<sup>9</sup>

- Gastrointestinal issues like vomiting, diarrhea, drooling, loss of appetite, and nausea are often the first sign of poisoning
- When internal bleeding occurs, signs like pale gums, racing heartbeat, vomiting or coughing up blood, and weakness or collapse may occur
- Black, tarry stools, jaundice, odd behavior or confusion, and weakness are signs of liver problems
- Excessive drinking or peeing, vomiting, bad breath, lack of interest in food, and lethargy are possible signs of kidney damage

## How to Respond to a Poisoning Emergency

If you think your pet has eaten something toxic, don't panic — but act fast. Here's what you should do:

1. **Call for help immediately** — Contact your vet, a local emergency animal clinic, or a pet poison hotline.
2. **Don't try home remedies** — Do not induce vomiting or give activated charcoal unless a vet tells you to.
3. **Have your pet's info ready** — Know your pet's age, weight, and what (and how much) they might have eaten. Take photos of the item or label if possible.
4. **Having a pet first aid kit is helpful** — Ideally, prepare one specifically designed for poisoning emergencies.
5. **Stay calm and follow instructions** — Quick action can save your pet's life, but it's important to act with guidance.

If your pet's behavior changes — if they seem sleepy, won't eat, or act strangely — bring them to your vet immediately.

## Simple Ways to Poison-Proof Your Home

Preventing poisoning starts with making your home safer. Think of this as pet-proofing, just like you would childproof a home.

1. **Secure medications and supplements** — Keep all prescription and over-the-counter pills, vitamins, and even herbal remedies locked away. Purses and backpacks are common hiding spots, so be sure guests store their bags out of your pet's reach.
2. **Watch what's on the counter** — Never leave food out, especially if it contains chocolate, onions, or xylitol. Many pets can jump onto counters or rummage through the trash.
3. **Choose pet-safe plants** — Before buying a plant or bouquet, check if it's safe for pets. If you're unsure, opt for known pet-friendly choices like spider plants or African violets.<sup>10</sup>

- 4. **Clean up your yard and garage** — Yard chemicals, fertilizers, and antifreeze should be stored tightly and out of reach. Pick up any spilled liquids right away.
- 5. **Be cautious with holiday items** — Gift wrap, alcohol, chocolate, and certain decorations can all be hazardous. Keep an eye on your pet during parties and gatherings.

## Awareness Is the Best Protection

Your dog or cat doesn’t know that a piece of chocolate or a blooming lily could put their life at risk. That’s why it’s up to you to recognize the hazards and take action. Fortunately, keeping your pet safe from poisoning doesn’t have to be hard.

A few smart changes, such as locking up medications, monitoring what foods are left out, and selecting pet-safe plants, can go a long way. When in doubt, always contact your veterinarian or a poison control hotline. It’s better to be safe than sorry.

### Sources and References

<sup>1,5,8</sup> [Virginia Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, March 1, 2023](#)

<sup>2,9</sup> [Berkeley Veterinary Center, March 18, 2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Lort Smith Melbourne Animal Hospital, Antidepressants \(SSRI\) – Dogs](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ASPCA, January 15, 2021](#)

<sup>6</sup> [PetMD, March 22, 2022](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Autumn Trails Veterinary Center, August 10, 2023](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Love That Leaf, Top 12 Pet Safe Indoor Plants for Cats and Dogs \(and one that can kill\)](#)

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