

Just Dropping 1 of These on the Floor Could Poison Your Pet

It's astounding how many pet owners are unaware of how poisonous these are for their pets. You may be taking one or more each day without realizing how deadly it would be if you accidentally dropped one or left it within your pet's reach. Here are the top 10 offenders from the Pet Poison Helpline.

Reviewed by **Dr. Becker**

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Even small doses of common prescription and over-the-counter medications intended for humans can be deadly to pets
- NSAIDs, acetaminophen, antidepressants and sleep aids are among the most common medications involved in pet poisonings
- Medications prescribed to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children, and beta-blockers prescribed for high blood pressure can also have life-threatening side effects in pets
- Every pet parent should take steps to store all medications and supplements out of their dog's or cat's reach
- If your pet has ingested a human over-the-counter or prescription medication call your veterinarian, a local emergency animal hospital or a pet poison hotline immediately

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Every year, tens of thousands of pet parents call animal poison control centers or their veterinarians concerned that their dog or cat has swallowed a toxic substance.

Pet poisoning from accidental ingestion of human medications accounts for one-quarter of calls to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) Animal Poison Control Center (APCC). Many pet owners are not aware that even over-the-counter medications can poison their pet.

Believe it or not, just one pill dropped on the floor or left on a counter or table can spell serious trouble for your pet. And even though some medications are prescribed for both animals and humans, it's a really bad idea to give your pet a medication that was prescribed for you, as the dose or ingredients could be dangerous.

Top 10 Human Medications That Can Poison Your Pet

The Pet Poison Helpline offers the following list of the 10 medications most often involved in pet poisonings.¹ If you have any of these in your home (and most of us have at least one), be sure they are kept safely out of your pet's reach at all times.

- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** — Topping the list of human medications that can get into the mouths of pets are nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or NSAIDs. Brand names include Advil, Motrin and Aleve. Your pet is extremely sensitive to compounds in these medications and can become very ill from even a very small dose. Cats can suffer kidney and liver damage, and any pet that ingests NSAIDs can develop ulcers of the digestive tract.

Symptoms of poisoning include digestive upset, vomiting, bloody stool, increased thirst, increased frequency of urination, staggering and seizures.

- **Acetaminophen** — Next on the list is another anti-inflammatory called acetaminophen, the most well-known of which is Tylenol. Other drugs, including certain types of Excedrin and several sinus and cold preparations, also contain acetaminophen.

Cats are at particular risk from acetaminophen, as just two extra-strength tablets can be fatal. If your dog ingests acetaminophen, permanent liver damage can be the result. And the higher the dose, the more likely that red blood cell damage will occur. Symptoms of acetaminophen poisoning are lethargy, trouble breathing, dark-colored urine, diarrhea and vomiting.

- **Antidepressants** — If your dog or cat ingests an antidepressant, symptoms can include listlessness, vomiting and in some cases, a condition known as serotonin syndrome. This condition can cause agitation, disorientation, and an elevated heart rate, along with elevated blood pressure and body temperature, tremors and seizures.

The drugs Cymbalta and Effexor topped the list of antidepressant pet poisonings. For some reason, kitties are drawn to these medications, which can cause severe neurologic and cardiac side effects. Other common brand names of antidepressants are Prozac and Lexapro.

- **ADD and ADHD drugs** — Prescription attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) drugs are amphetamines and are very dangerous for pets. Ingesting even minimal amounts of these medications can cause life-threatening tremors, seizures, elevated body temperature and heart problems. Common brand names include Concerta, Adderall and Ritalin.
- **Benzodiazepines and sleep aids** — Benzodiazepines and sleep aids with brand names like Xanax, Klonopin, Ambien and Lunesta, are designed to reduce anxiety and help people sleep better. However, in pets, they sometimes have the opposite effect.

About half the dogs who ingest sleep aids become agitated instead of sedated. In addition, these drugs may cause severe lethargy, incoordination and a slowed breathing rate. In cats, some forms of benzodiazepines can cause liver failure.

- **Birth control medications** — Birth control pills (e.g., estrogen, estradiol, progesterone) often come in packages that dogs find very tempting. Fortunately, small amounts of these medications typically aren't problematic. However, large ingestions of estrogen and estradiol can cause bone marrow suppression, especially in birds. In addition, intact female pets are at an increased risk of side effects from estrogen poisoning.
- **Ace inhibitors** — Angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors such as Zestril and Altace are commonly used to treat high blood pressure in people and, occasionally, pets. Though overdoses can cause low blood pressure, dizziness and weakness, this category of medication is typically safe. Pets ingesting small amounts of this medication can be monitored at home, unless they have kidney failure or heart disease.

- **Beta-blockers** — Even taken in very small quantities, beta-blockers used to treat high blood pressure can cause serious problems for pets. Overdoses can trigger life-threatening decreases in blood pressure and a very slow heart rate.
- **Thyroid hormones** — Pets — especially dogs — get underactive thyroids too. However, the dose of thyroid hormone (e.g., Armour, Nature-Throid and WP Thyroid, Synthroid) needed to treat dogs is much higher than the human dose. Therefore, if dogs accidentally get into thyroid hormones at home, it rarely results in problems. However, large acute overdoses in cats and dogs can cause muscle tremors, nervousness, panting, a rapid heart rate and aggression.
- **Cholesterol lowering agents** — These medications, often called "statins," include the brand names Lipitor, Zocor and Crestor. While pets don't typically get high cholesterol, they may still get into the pill bottle. Thankfully, most ingestions only cause mild vomiting or diarrhea. Serious side effects from these drugs come with long-term use, not one-time ingestions.

How to Keep Your Pet Safe from Medication Poisoning

To prevent your dog or cat from getting into your medications, always keep them safely out of reach and never administer a medication to your pet without first consulting with your veterinarian.

- Never leave loose pills in a plastic sandwich bag — the bags are too easy to chew into. Make sure all family members and guests do the same, keeping their medications out of reach.
- If you keep your medication in a pillbox or weekly pill container, make sure to store the container in a cabinet, as your dog might think it's a plastic chew toy.
- Never store your medications near your pet's medications. Pet poison hotlines receive hundreds of calls every year from concerned pet owners who have inadvertently given their own medication to their pet.
- Hang up your purse or backpack. Curious pets will explore the contents of your bag and simply placing it up out of reach solves the problem.

Remember: Nearly 50% of all pet poisonings involve human drugs. Pets metabolize medications very differently from people. Even seemingly benign over-the-counter herbal medications, human vitamins and mineral supplements may cause serious poisoning in pets. If your pet has ingested a human over-the-counter or prescription medication, please call your veterinarian, your local emergency animal hospital or Pet Poison Helpline's 24-hour animal poison control center at 855-764-7661 immediately.

Sources and References

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¹ [Pet Poison Helpline](#)
