

PET SAFETY TIPS HOUSEHOLD TOXINS

—Melissa Shapiro, DVM

Every year, countless numbers of dogs and cats are inadvertently poisoned by household items. Innocent backpacks house Xylitol-containing candies and gum, and lunch boxes hold grapes and raisins, all highly toxic to dogs. Dark and baker's chocolate are very toxic to dogs, cats, birds, and rodents. Chewable medication meant for humans (kid's Tylenol) and chewable animal medications (chewable anti-inflammatory medication) smell and taste like treats to non-discriminating, food-motivated dogs and cats and pose a toxic risk. Xylitol ingestion can be deadly to dogs. Some toothpaste, mints, gums, and medication contain Xylitol. Tylenol ingestion can be fatal to cats, and inhaling fumes from Teflon pans can be fatal to birds. Some house plants (lilies) and illegal substances (marijuana) can create mysterious symptoms that sometimes require serious detective work to identify. Pesticides and fertilizers used in yards as well as an assortment of mushrooms found in damp grass and woods can be extremely toxic to pets. Fumes from and ingestion of household cleaners and other chemicals can also be very dangerous to pets.

So, how can you protect your indoor pets from these lurking household dangers?

1. Know what's dangerous and what's not. The ASPCA Poison Control website (www.ASPCA.org) has lists of common household toxins that you should become familiar with.
2. Keep known toxins well out of the reach of your pets. Children should understand that when they are baking, the baker's chocolate needs to be put back in a cabinet well out of reach of hungry dogs and cats. The kids should also understand that they just can't leave their orbit gum in their backpack, on the floor, where the dog can find it. Raisin bread, chocolate and raisin containing energy bars and grapes shouldn't be sitting on kitchen counters waiting for the surfing pup to find them.
3. Use care when treating yards with chemical and fertilizers. Be sure to keep containers of antifreeze for your car closed tightly and clean up any leaks in the driveway.
4. Keep the ASPCA Poison Control number (1-888-426-4435) handy so that if there's an emergency, you don't have to start searching for it. Expect \$65 consultation charge for most calls.
5. Keep your regular veterinarian's number along with the emergency hospital numbers in your phone directory as well as on the refrigerator for quick reference.
6. Buy or build a complete pet first aid kit. Include a fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide and syringes, which are used to induce vomiting. Bandaging materials, tweezers, thermometer, nail trimmer, hemostats and a cold pack are examples of other first aid kit items.
7. Speak to your veterinarian about how you can protect your pet from common household and other toxins.

Melissa Shapiro, DVM is the owner of Your Senior Pet's Vet (www.yourseniorpetsvet.com), a mobile veterinary practice offering custom in-home vet care to very special senior patients.

Your Senior Pet's Vet operates with the primary goal of maintaining dignity and good quality of life for pets and their people. Dr. Shapiro lives in Westport with her husband, three children, 6 rescued dogs, and 4 rescued House Sparrows. Your Senior Pet's Vet is a subdivision of the Visiting Vet Service.

