

HOUSEHOLD DANGERS

Most people, myself included, are confident that our homes provide a safe environment. However for our pets, often times there are hidden or unsuspected dangers.

Let's start with food.

There are many foods that are fine for people to eat but not so fine for our pets. Some foods, such as avocado, are only dangerous to certain kinds of pets such as pet birds or pet goats. Grapes and raisins can be a deadly toxin for dogs, although a few dogs seem to be somewhat resistant. For most, however, it causes kidney failure.

Milk chocolate will usually only cause gastrointestinal upsets, but as little as one square of baker's chocolate can kill a 30 lbs. dog. Onions are also deadly. A few pieces cooked into food will not cause obvious illness, but one roasted onion or a "blooming onion" can kill a Labrador sized dog. Cats are even more affected. Garlic and chives can also cause poisonings, though not as common.

Artificial sweeteners can also be deadly. Many of the sweeteners such as malitol and especially xylitol are so close to sugar that a dog's body will mistake it for sugar and release large amounts of insulin. Since there is no actual sugar, the pet can go into insulin shock and seizure and even die from hypoglycemia.

Raw eggs have an enzyme called avidin that destroys certain B vitamins in the body, causing deficiencies. That's not saying that 1 raw egg will cause a problem, but if fed on a regular basis, then it will cause subtle but debilitating problems.

Macadamia nuts can cause weakness, depression, vomiting, tremors and hyperthermia (elevated body temperature) in dogs. Signs usually appear within 12 hours of ingestion

Household products

Most carpet fresheners and carpet shampoos are safe to use with pets. A little common sense such as letting carpet dry before letting pets back and using products according to directions should avoid any problems.

People like to assume that because something is "natural or organic" then it is safe. Not so, there are many substances that are natural and organic and toxic. Certain essential oils can be quite toxic. Cats are particularly sensitive and inhalation of many common essential oils can lead to gastrointestinal upset, central nervous system toxicity and permanent liver damage. Pennyroyal oil is often touted as a good mosquito or flea repellent, but this particular oil is quite toxic, even to people.

Dryer sheets can also pose a hazard. Fresh unused sheets, if mouthed or ingested can cause drooling, vomiting, ulceration of the mouth and esophagus. Used sheets are not as dangerous, but could cause intestinal blockage if swallowed.

Contrary to internet urban legends, Febreze products are safe when used as directed. Another urban legend which is not true is the rumor about Swiffer wet jet products. Once again, under normal usage, this is also safe. It DOES NOT contain antifreeze.

Human medications

Adderall, as well as many ADD drugs, contains amphetamines, which stimulate the central nervous and cardiovascular systems. Amphetamines can be very harmful or even deadly to pets if enough are ingested, potentially causing hyperactivity, tremors and seizures, fever, abnormal heart rate and rhythm, coma and even death.

Aspirin and baby aspirin are poor choices for pain relief for pets. Besides not being very effective, they often cause GI ulcers and other more serious, life threatening complications. Use only products developed especially for animals. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can cause GI and liver inflammation in dogs, and it is deadly toxic to cats.

Breath mints and breath fresheners often contain menthol which can be irritating. And they often are sweetened with xylitol which, as mentioned before, can cause a lethal drop in blood sugar levels.

Cigarettes and other tobacco products can be very toxic to pets if ingested. Nicotine can cause decreased blood pressure, elevated heart rate, seizure and respiratory failure. This includes E-cigarette liquid and nicotine patches. The amount of nicotine in one of these E-cigarette bottles could easily kill a dog.

Dog and cat proofing the home is much like toddler proofing. Keeping detergents and cleaning products out of reach, keeping all medications locked up, and not giving "human" medicine to your pets will go a long way to making them safe. Remember that certain food which are fine for humans can be deadly to a pet. Stick to the pet food and everyone will be happy and healthy.