

## **Human Medications Toxic to Pets**

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker. Every year, tens of thousands of pet guardians call animal poison control centers concerned that their dog or cat has swallowed a toxic substance. While most conscientious pet owners are aware of poisons and other potential hazards around the home, many don't realize that several very common over-the-counter and prescription human medications can spell disaster for a beloved pet.

### **Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)**

Topping the list of human medications that can get into the mouths of pets are non-steroidal 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 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 brand being Tylenol. Other brand names, including certain types of Excedrin and even a lot of sinus and cold preparations also contain acetaminophen. Cats are at a particular risk from acetaminophen. Just two extra-strength tablets can be fatal to your cat. If your dog ingests acetaminophen, permanent liver damage can be a 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.

### **Pseudoephedrine**

Next up on the list is pseudoephedrine. Pseudoephedrine is a decongestant compound found in a wide range of cold and sinus medications. Many of these preparations also contain acetaminophen as well. Pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine, which are both decongestants, are highly toxic to pets. A tablet containing just 30 milligrams of pseudoephedrine can cause a small dog to show clinical signs of toxicosis or toxicity. Three 30-milligram tablets in the same small dog can prove to be fatal.

### **Antidepressant**

If your dog or cat ingests an antidepressant, symptoms can include listlessness, vomiting, and in some cases, a condition known as serotonin syndrome. In this condition, animals can become agitated, disoriented, and they can have an elevated heart rate. They can also have an elevated blood pressure and body temperature, tremors, and seizures. Cymbalta and Effexor topped the list in 2013. 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.

### **Anti-diabetic Drugs**

If you or a family member takes an oral medication for diabetes, including glipizide and glyburide, you'll want to make sure to keep these medications out of your pet's reach as well. Anti-diabetic drugs can cause a dangerous drop in blood sugar levels of a dog or cat and could bring on disorientation, lack of coordination, and seizures.

### **ADD and ADHD Drugs**

Prescription attention deficit disorder (ADD) attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) drugs are amphetamines that can cause tremors, heart problems, seizures, and even death in pets. Even minimal ingestions of these medications by pets can cause life-threatening tremors, seizures, elevated body temperatures, and heart problems. Common brand names include Concerta, Adderall, and Ritalin.

### **Vitamin D Derivatives**

Vitamin D derivatives like calcitriol and calcipotriene used to treat a wide range of human conditions – including psoriasis, thyroid problems, and osteoporosis – can be quite fatal to dogs and cats rapidly because they cause blood calcium level spikes in your dog or cat. Signs of toxicosis include loss of appetite, vomiting, increased urination, and excessive thirst due to kidney failure.

### **Beta-blockers**

Even taken in very small quantities, beta-blockers used to treat high blood pressure for people can cause serious poisoning in pets. Overdoses can cause life-threatening decreases in blood pressure and a very slow heart rate in your pets.

### **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 an 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 form of benzodiazepines can cause liver failure when ingested.

### **Safety Reminders**

In order to prevent dogs and cats from getting into one of your medications, always keep them safely out of reach and never administer a medication to your pet without first consulting your veterinarian. Also, never leave loose pills in a plastic sandwich bag because these pills are obviously really easy to get into for pets. Make sure all family members and guests do the same, keeping their medications high up or out of reach.

If you keep your medication in a pill box or a weekly pill container, make sure to store the container in a cabinet, as oftentimes dogs think it's just a plastic chew toy and get into it pretty easily. 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 pets. Hang up your purse or backpack. Curious pets will explore the contents of your bag and simply placing it up high is going to reduce that potential.

Remember: Nearly 50 percent of all pet poisonings involve human drugs. Pets metabolize medications very differently from people. Even seemingly benign over-the-counter herbal medications, including 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, which is a 24-hour Animal Poison Control Center, at 800-213-6680 immediately.

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