

Want to Spare Your Pet From Cancer? Stop Smoking Cigarettes

It's bad enough for you. But doing this can be even worse for pets who spend their time in the house and on the floor, soaking in carcinogenic toxins day in and day out. And it's not just cancer. It's linked to respiratory diseases in dogs, outright death in birds, and more.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Studies show that pets are at even greater risk from passive smoke than people are
- Cats are more affected by second and third-hand smoke than dogs, and passive smoke can be fatal to pet birds
- Smokers can minimally reduce their pet's exposure to carcinogens by smoking outside the house, cutting back on the amount they smoke, and washing their hands and face and changing clothes before handling their pet
- Pets can also be harmed by ingesting any portion of a cigarette, cigar, or stop-smoking aid, or by drinking water that has been contaminated by a cigarette butt

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Researchers at the University of Glasgow in Scotland are urging pet owners who smoke to give up the habit for the sake of their animal companions.

Research shows that pets are at greater risk from passive smoking than even humans are, because furry family members spend more time at home and on the floor, where carcinogenic particles tend to linger.

There's also the problem of third-hand smoke particles, which are thought to be more hazardous than second-hand smoke.

Third-hand smoke is the residue that remains in the smoker's environment on furniture, rugs, curtains, fabric lampshades, clothing, human skin, animal fur, and other surfaces.

Living With a Smoker Significantly Increases a Pet's Risk of Serious Disease

An ongoing study at Glasgow is clearly demonstrating a direct link between pets living with smokers and a higher risk of serious health problems including cancer, cell damage, and overweight/obesity.

According to Clare Knottenbelt, Glasgow study leader and professor of small animal medicine and oncology:

"Our findings show that exposure to smoke in the home is having a direct impact on pets. It risks ongoing cell damage, increasing weight gain after castration and has previously been shown to increase the risk of certain cancers."¹

Previous study results have concluded that dogs take in significant amounts of smoke when living in a smoking household.

The current study involves cats, and shows that they are even more affected than dogs, very possibly due to their grooming habits, which cause them to ingest smoke residue clinging to their fur.

As an incidental finding, the researchers discovered that dogs living with owners who smoke appear to gain more weight after being spayed or neutered than dogs living with nonsmokers.

The researchers also examined the testicles of just-neutered male dogs living in smoking households and found that a gene that acts as a marker for cell damage was higher in those dogs than dogs living with nonsmokers.

Other studies have shown this same gene is altered in dogs with certain kinds of cancer, so this finding is troubling.

Past Research Highlights the Dangers of Passive Smoke for Pets

Past studies have concluded that dogs living in smoking households are more likely to suffer from respiratory diseases like asthma and bronchitis, and also lung cancer, than dogs living with nonsmokers.

- A Colorado State University study found a higher incidence of nasal tumors and cancer of the sinus in dogs living in a home with smokers, compared to those living in a smoke-free environment.²

The nasal/sinus tumors were specifically found among the long-nosed breeds such as retrievers and German Shepherds. Sadly, dogs with nasal cancer do not usually survive more than one year.

- The same CSU study showed higher lung cancer rates in short to medium nosed dogs, such as Boxers and Bulldogs, who live with smokers. Their shorter muzzles allowed more cancer-causing particles to reach the lungs.
- Another study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology found that dogs in smoking households have a 60% greater risk of lung cancer.³

Daily grooming exposes a cat's delicate oral tissues to hazardous amounts of cancer-causing substances. Even minimal amounts of exposure to passive smoke can damage your kitty's health.

- A Tufts University study linked secondhand smoke to cancer in cats.⁴ The study found that cats living with smokers are more than twice as likely to develop malignant lymphoma, which is the most common feline cancer, as those in smoke-free homes. And cats with 5 or more years of second and third-hand smoke exposure had a three times higher risk.
- A University of Minnesota study showed that cats who live with smokers have nicotine and other toxins in their urine.⁵
- A Tufts University study linked secondhand smoke to oral cancer (squamous cell carcinoma) in cats.⁶ Kitties living with more than one smoker and those exposed to passive smoke for longer than 5 years had even higher rates of this cancer.

Cigarette Smoke Is Also Highly Toxic to Birds

Passive smoke can be fatal to pet birds. I don't recommend you smoke around your bird or allow anyone else to, but if you are a smoker, you should not smoke in the home your bird lives in and disinfect yourself before handling your bird.

Wash your hands, rinse out your mouth, and change your clothes. I strongly urge people who smoke to avoid contact with birds, period. Honestly, smokers are toxic to birds.

Smoking Outdoors, Cutting Back May Be Helpful. Quitting Is Ideal

The Glasgow study results so far indicate that even with outdoor access, kitties living in smoking environments take in significant amounts of smoke. And smoking away from household pets doesn't eliminate their exposure — it only reduces the amount of smoke they take into their bodies.

People who keep the total number of tobacco products smoked in the home under 10 per day have cats with significantly less nicotine in their fur, but still more than cats living in non-smoking environments. According to Knottenbelt:

"We are all aware of the risks to our health of smoking and it is important we do everything we can to encourage people to stop smoking.

As well as the risk to the smoker, there is the danger of second-hand smoke to others. Pet owners often do not think about the impact that smoking could have on their pets.

Whilst you can reduce the amount of smoke your pet is exposed to by smoking outdoors and by reducing the number of tobacco products smoked by the members of the household, stopping smoking completely is the best option for your pet's future health and wellbeing."⁷

Additional Dangers of Tobacco Products

There are other ways your dog, cat or other pet can be poisoned by tobacco products, including:

- By eating any portion of a cigarette or cigar
- By drinking water that is contaminated by a cigarette butt
- By ingesting a stop-smoking aid like nicotine gum or a nicotine patch

Nicotine is toxic to pets, and eating a cigarette, chewing tobacco, or even just a portion of a cigar can be fatal. Signs of nicotine poisoning include drooling, constricted pupils, vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, seizures and cardiac abnormalities. If you think your pet has ingested a nicotine product, call the Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435 immediately and/or get him to a vet or emergency clinic right away.

Sources and References

[CBS Boston January 4, 2016](#)

^{1,7} [University of Glasgow, December 29, 2015](#)

² [Reif, JS et al. Am. J. Epidemiol. \(1998\) 147\(5\):488-492](#)

³ [Passive smoking and canine lung cancer risk. Reif JS et al. Am J Epidemiol. 1992 Feb 1;135\(3\):234-9](#)

⁴ [Environmental tobacco smoke and risk of malignant lymphoma in pet cats. Bertone, ER et al. Am J Epidemiol. 2002 Aug 1;156\(3\):268-73](#)

⁵ [Urinary biomarkers to assess exposure of cats to environmental tobacco smoke. McNeil, EA et al. Am J Vet Res. 2007 Apr;68\(4\):349-53](#)

⁶ [p53 expression and environmental tobacco smoke exposure in feline oral squamous cell carcinoma. Snyder LA, et al. Vet Pathol. 2004 May;41\(3\):309-14](#)
