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Household Hazards

Making your home safe for your new puppy!

Just like for a toddler, your home can be full of hazards for your pets. This is especially true if you have a new puppy or kitten, but even adult pets can get injured or ill in your home.

Flavored medications: Beware of flavored medications. While this may make administering medications to your pet (or your child) much easier, they are temptations for even the best behaved. If your dog eats his entire bottle of arthritis medication, he is not going to be pain-free for a longer time period, he is going to be SICK! Overdoses of even mild or over the counter medications can cause liver damage, kidney damage, upset stomach, and sometimes can be fatal.

Over the counter medications: While it may be tempting to try and treat your pet yourself until you can get an appointment with your veterinarian, avoid this temptation. Did you know that acetaminophen (Tylenol) is lethal to cats? Cats lack an enzyme to break the acetaminophen down into components that can be excreted from the body. The acetaminophen damages the red blood cells in the body and if this damage is not treated immediately (within 3 hours after administration), your cat could die. Medications often contain hidden components. For example, Pepto-Bismol and Kaopectate both contain salicylates, derivatives of aspirin. While an appropriate dog sized dose won't hurt, excessive amounts could cause GI ulceration, the opposite of what you're trying to accomplish. Also, cats can't tolerate salicylates so don't ever give them aspirin, Pepto, or Kaopectate.

Foods: Many people know that chocolate is toxic to dogs, but it is relatively unknown that some dogs may be susceptible to a grape or raisin toxicity. Though it is not yet fully understood, some dogs develop irreversible kidney failure after eating a snack of grapes or raisins. Another relatively unknown toxicity is onions or garlic. This potential toxin is much more dangerous to cats than to dogs, but can affect dogs as well. Cats that ingest onions or garlic can develop anemia, called Heinz body anemia. Check labels carefully, the use of baby foods that contain onion powder can cause this type of anemia. Garlic is more potent than onions for causing this syndrome.

String/yarn/curling ribbon: Cats are notorious for ingesting long stringy things. There are probably not very many practicing veterinarians out there who haven't removed a linear foreign body, aka curling ribbon and the likes, from a cat's intestinal tract. Occasionally, a loop of whatever stringy thing they are ingesting will get caught on the tongue, giving away the diagnosis. Sometimes, though, the diagnosis is slightly more elusive and radiographs may need to be taken.

Unfortunately, if your cat is diagnosed with a linear foreign body, the only treatment is surgery. Even if the end is still in your cat's mouth, pulling it out is not an option.

Don't ever fashion a cat toy from curling ribbon, you will be spending a small fortune on surgery, instead of a minimal amount on an appropriate toy! Puppies also swallow strings and the like so make sure they never have an opportunity to!

Electric cords: These are not usually a problem except for puppies and maybe kittens. Puppies will sometimes chew on electric cords (what don't they chew on??) if they are left unattended or don't have an alternative to use for teething. The danger exists if the cord is plugged into the outlet. Electrocutation is a real possibility. This is one of the many reasons that crate training your puppy is so beneficial, it not only keeps him from messing up your house, it keeps him safe and sound.

Plants: There are really just way too many plants that are toxic to pets to discuss them here. Some of the more common ones include most varieties of lilies, aloe plants, philodendron, and diffenbachia. If you have a pet that just won't leave your plants alone, make sure to check with your veterinarian about potential toxicity. Maybe a friend that doesn't have any pets would be willing to adopt your toxic plant.

Cleaning products: Most cleaning products are toxic to pets or people if they are ingested. Most pets won't eat cleaning products because they taste bad. The internet rumor about the demise of a dog that licked its paws clean of Swiffer WetJet cleaning fluid is absolutely false. First of all, antifreeze causes kidney failure, not liver failure which was the cause of the dog's illness. Second of all, all products that are used to clean have some sort of statement to this effect on the packaging. It is probably best to keep your pets (and kids) away from all cleaning products because they can certainly be irritating to the skin and mucus membranes and are certainly harmful if swallowed.

Antifreeze: While most people don't keep antifreeze in their home, they may keep it in the garage. Antifreeze tastes sweet and many pets will be tempted to lick it up if spilled on the floor or leaking from a car. The metabolism of the antifreeze within the body causes severe kidney damage and failure. If you see your pet lick antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately, there is an antidote. Unfortunately if you don't witness the event and your pet develops symptoms because of the antifreeze ingestion, it is usually too late to provide treatment.

There are many household items and products that can be hazardous to your pet. It is important that you check with your veterinarian before giving any medication to your pet. Read the labels carefully and let your vet know everything that is in the product you are asking about. Better yet, take the product into the office and have your veterinarian look at it for you. Sometimes generic packaging can be confusing and multiple medications are often packaged into one convenient pill. This can be a huge problem for your pet. Protect your pets from household hazards, they're depending on you for it.