

## Toxins and ASPCA Poison Control

**ASPCA Poison Control Phone Number: (888) 426-4435**

Pets frequently ingest things they should not. There are numerous plants, foods, chemicals, and medications that can be poisonous to pets. If you suspect your pet has ingested something poisonous, or if you are unsure whether it is poisonous, you should evaluate your pet for signs of acute distress and seek emergency medical attention if any signs of distress are present. These may include but are not limited to difficulty breathing, protracted vomiting, severe diarrhea, acute lethargy, pale or blue gums, weakness or collapse, rapid heart rate, or seizure activity. If possible, you should have someone call Animal Poison Control while you are driving to the emergency hospital so that a case can be established. However, your priority is your pet and if you are unable to establish an Animal Poison Control case right away, it can be done after your pet is at the hospital. If your pet is not distressed, you should still plan on a trip to the veterinarian, but you should call Animal Poison Control to establish a case.

Animal Poison Control is a phone-based service staffed with veterinary toxicologists that can make very specific recommendations based on your pet's size and the amount and type of toxin ingested. In some cases, they will advise emergent evaluation and hospitalization; in other cases, they may consider the risk of toxicity low enough that you can monitor your pet at home. You call them to open a case. You will be assigned a case number, which your veterinarian can then use to speak with a toxicologist at any point in time for the duration of your pet's toxicity.

There are numerous toxins capable of causing a wide range of symptoms from mild GI upset to life-threatening neurologic or cardiovascular signs or organ failure. It is important that you provide your veterinarian and/or ASPCA Poison Control a list of everything your pet could have been exposed to, as some things that are completely non-toxic to people can cause severe toxicity in dogs and cats (sugar-free gum or grapes, for example). Along those lines, it is important to list any drugs or medications to which your pet could have access.

**Inducing Emesis (Vomiting):**

In many cases, the easiest way to decrease the risk of an animal suffering toxic effects from something he/she ingested is to induce vomiting. If it is safe to do so, we can administer an IV medication called apomorphine to induce vomiting. There are risks of inducing vomiting, including aspiration pneumonia if vomit is aspirated into the airways. This is uncommon but should be considered in breeds at higher risk for aspiration pneumonia (brachycephalics); the risks of vomiting should be weighed against the risks of the toxin.

We will often give anti-nausea medication shortly after we induce vomiting, so the pet does not continue to feel nauseated.

Hydrogen peroxide is being used with less frequency to induce vomiting, but in some cases is still used at home. It can cause significant irritation and ulceration of the stomach, so when possible, it is preferable to induce vomiting with a veterinarian.

**Activated Charcoal:**

Activated charcoal is a second method for decontaminating the GI tract; it works by preventing absorption of certain toxins from the GI tract. Importantly, not all toxins are bound by activated charcoal. Activated charcoal is typically administered in the hospital. Repeated doses may be necessary. Some patients eat it readily when it's mixed with food, while others require that it be syringed or given through a feeding tube. Activated charcoal must be given carefully and with an anti-nausea medication on-board, as it can cause significant aspiration pneumonia if it goes into the airways. It can cause an increase in sodium and in some pets, ASPCA advises against it for this reason. It will turn the stool black temporarily.

**Intralipid Emulsion:**

Intralipid therapy is used for certain toxins that are fat-soluble. ASPCA Poison Control has a list of fat-solubilities of most common toxins and can advise when intralipid therapy could be of benefit. ILE is a lipid solution that is given through an IV catheter over an hour or more. It creates a "lipid sink" in the blood stream that traps toxins and hastens their elimination from the body. By trapping the toxin in the lipid sink, ILE can decrease the amount of toxin that reaches the brain, among other target organs. There are potential risks and side-effects with intralipid emulsion therapy, and those risks should be weighed against potential benefits.

**Emergency Referral and Hospitalization:**

Some toxin exposures necessitate referral to an emergency and specialty hospital for specific antidotes, fluid diuresis, or more intensive monitoring and care.

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