

Common Toxins

Any of the following **can be toxic**:

- Onions and garlic
- Raisins and grapes
- Dairy products
- Nuts
- Coffee and caffeine products
- Some mushrooms
- Avocados
- Chocolate (unsweetened baking chocolate being the most toxic)
- Alcohol
- Uncooked or rotten foods (including items found outside such as road kill)
- Various wild animal or insects stings and bites
- Insect sprays and chemical traps
- Rodent poisons and baits
- Many over-the-counter medications for people
- Most prescription medications for people
- Antifreeze and products that melt ice
- Mothballs
- Batteries
- Decorations that may contain toxic ingredients
- Prescriptions administered at the wrong dose
- Fertilizers (outdoor and indoor use)
- Lead paint (found in older houses)
- Pool water and pool or hot tub chemicals/treatments
- Commonly found indoor and outdoor plants
- Prescriptions administered via the wrong route

Depending upon the poison and the route of exposure (oral or topical, for example), an animal will exhibit a wide range of symptoms. Some symptoms will occur rapidly after exposure, some will appear after a period of time. Unfortunately, symptoms have as wide a range as the list of potential toxins.

After exposure to a toxin symptoms may be:

- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Drooling uncontrollably
- Increased thirst and increased urination
- Open-mouth breathing or other respiratory distress -- may have a different smell to the breath
- Discolored gums--ranging from brick red to pale pink/white to bluish-pink
- Red spots on the gums and/or the skin
- Seem uncomfortable, anxious, restless, or hyperactive
- Seem depressed, lethargic, drunk or in a stupor, have a wobbly gait (ataxia)
- Have muscle tremors or seizures
- Death

Unfortunately, identifying any of the above symptoms does not necessarily pinpoint a specific toxin or even a poisoning in general. However, they can certainly help reach a diagnosis of poisoning when the entire history of the pet is reviewed and other diagnostic tools are initiated.

Different poisons affect different systems of a pet. Some topical materials may cause mild contact irritations or reactions with whatever surface they touch; eyes may become reddened and produce discharge, skin (ears, abdomen, paw pads--wherever the contact was--may develop rash and/or hair loss. Poisons ingested or even absorbed topically can cause gastric upset ranging from vomiting and/or diarrhea (either may show blood), neurological disorders (tremors, seizures, coma), organ compromise or failure (kidneys and liver responsible for filtering out toxins), cardiac disorders (increased heart rate with chocolate and caffeine products, decreased with depressants), and respiratory disorders (tracheal burns with inhaled exposures, lung congestion). Some damage may be reversible, some damage may be permanent; the ability to reverse the damage may be related to the level of exposure (how much toxin was actually pulled into the system), length of exposure (one time exposure vs. repeated exposure), and the severity of the exposure.

1. Always save the container if there is a known or possible toxin exposure! A label on the container can help the veterinarian identify the chemical responsible for the poisoning and choose the appropriate treatment. The label may also help determine the volume of poison consumed or dose of chemical administered.
2. Try to determine the approximate time of exposure. While the timing cannot always be exactly identified even the window of possible time can help decide treatment.

Treatment will depend upon the level of exposure (how much poison was potentially ingested/administered), the timing of the exposure (recent vs. extended time has passed), physiology behind the poisoning (what does the poison actually do to the body), and potential result of the poisoning (minimal gastric upset or life-threatening consequences).

Immediate identification of an ingested poisoning (not only that the pet ingested a poison but the identification of the poison itself) and removal of it from the system via vomiting can be a quick end to the crisis. This should typically be performed by the veterinarian or under the guidance or instruction of a veterinarian.

If the pet does not vomit or if the poison ingested is too corrosive, the pet may need extensive treatment, ranging from the stomach flushing (not indicated for corrosive poisons), administration of products that absorb toxins (activated charcoal), administration of products that encourage passage of material through the gastrointestinal tract, and general supportive care including administration of IV fluids, antibiotics, and pharmaceuticals specific for treatment of the ingested poison.

Treatment for topical exposure should be treated with immediate bathing of the pet (wear protective clothing). The client can bathe the pet with a medication-free (don't add more chemicals to the problem!) shampoo to remove as much of the toxin as possible. Some petroleum-based toxins are best removed with de-greasing soap such as dishwashing detergent. Even if the client does not have a safe shampoo, rinsing the pet off with plain water can still help. Be sure to check with the veterinarian before bathing a pet. Obviously, the best solution to poisoning is prevention.

Poison Control Resource Info

National Animal Poison Control Center	900-680-0000 or 800-548-2423
ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center Hotline	888-426-4435
National Pesticides Telecommunication	800-858-7378