

CAT 9

# Hidden dangers



**BLUE** FOR  
PETS  
**CROSS**

The charity dedicated to helping sick, injured and homeless pets since 1897.



## **Hidden dangers**

**Cats are curious and playful creatures, but these charming characteristics can get them into trouble. Many accidents involving household and garden chemicals can be avoided by keeping cats away when they are in use.**

Young cats are the most curious and the most prone to getting into scrapes. Especially as pets age, it is a good idea for them to have a regular (at least annual) check-up at the vet. This may pick up on hidden problems. It is better for the vet to discover that your cat has a heart problem than to have to rush to the vet in the middle of the night with a seriously ill pet.

For further information, see the pet care leaflet, Basic healthcare (C6).

## Road accidents

Cars are the greatest danger for cats. It is a good idea to keep your cat indoors at night (serving a tasty morsel at nightfall encourages your pet to come home!). Failing that, a reflective collar makes your pet more visible. Neutering makes your cat less inclined to roam and is particularly beneficial for males. Male cats that have not been neutered are at serious risk of an incurable virus disease called FIV – see the pet care leaflet, FIV (C16).

## Falling

Cats love to climb, but they can also fall. Falls from balconies are common and can cause horrific injuries that can be fatal. Prevent falls by making balconies and windows safe with wire mesh. If your cat does fall from more than one storey, the animal should be checked by the vet.

Even if your cat appears to be fine, there is a risk of internal injuries. Get a check after any fall if your cat seems to be behaving strangely.

## Chemical poisons

Keep all cleaning and garden chemicals safely shut away, and keep your cat out of the way when using them. Always keep your cat away from domestic products such as paint and varnish removers, rust remover, glue and fire extinguisher chemicals as they can all cause poisoning. The fumes from products such as varnish and paint remover can also be dangerous, so do not have the cat in the room when you are using them, and wait until the fumes have dispersed before letting the cat back in.

Slug pellets are poisonous – either use a non-toxic form of slug control, or cover treated areas with chicken wire so that pets cannot get to them. Some types of weed killers (those containing paraquat) are extremely dangerous for pets and humans alike. Antifreeze is extremely toxic – store and dispose of it safely.

Rat and mice poisons are another hazard for cats – both through eating the bait, and from catching poisoned rodents. Many of these poisons are coloured for easy identification – so if you have seen the bait, make a note of the colour. Also, batteries of all types are dangerous if swallowed.

## Getting shut in

Cats are naturally curious and notorious for their ability to sneak into places where they may not be wanted. There are many tales of cats being shut under floorboards, or into removal vans, or just getting locked into a neighbour's garden shed. This can have dire consequences, as lack of water can cause dehydration. Older cats are particularly vulnerable because ageing kidneys mean that dehydration occurs rapidly.

If your cat goes missing it is worth thinking about what has been happening in the neighbourhood recently and going to make enquiries. You should also ring around the local vets and animal shelters or welfare societies in case your wanderer has been taken into one of these. Look on the internet as well, as there are several sites where you can report a missing pet. Having your pet microchipped increases the chances of being reunited.

## Poisonous plants

There are many poisonous plants but, fortunately, most cats rarely pay them any attention. Young cats, and especially indoor cats, may through curiosity or boredom, try chewing houseplants



– so they are most at risk of poisoning. Dieffenbachia (dumb cane or leopard lily), causes irritation of the mouth and can be toxic, as can all plants of the Liliaceae and Hemerocallis family (such as Easter Lily, Tiger Lily or Oriental lilies). Even small quantities of lily leaf or pollen can be dangerous. Do not have these as houseplants if you have a cat. Contact your vet promptly if your cat has eaten any part of a lily. Other potentially poisonous common plants include cyclamen, poinsettia and amaryllis.

Be careful when you are working in the garden. Your cat may take an unhealthy interest in discarded plant material, so remove it promptly. Garden ponds are another hazard. Cats interested in fishing may fall in and can drown! Any cat that has “nearly drowned” should see a vet, even if the pet appears unhurt, as there is a risk of complications.



## Stitched up?

Cats are fond of chasing bits of thread and these can cause problems in two ways. Needles can get stuck in the mouth and throat but, more seriously, the thread may be swallowed and can cause the bowel to become tucked-up and telescoped in on itself. Thread can even tighten to act like a cheese wire and cut the bowel. This is extremely dangerous and requires surgery.

This can also happen from eating tinsel at Christmas, or raiding rubbish and eating string used to tie up meat. Chewing electric cables can be dangerous as well.

## Don't forget the coat...

Cats can be poisoned by licking chemicals off their coats. If your cat's coat becomes soiled, use an Elizabethan collar or wrap the animal in a towel to stop licking. You can try to remove small amounts with water only, or by clipping off affected hair. Never use turpentine or paint remover on your cat – they are also toxic. If the coat is heavily soiled, you should contact the vet immediately. If you have been using chemicals in the garden, do not forget that cats lick their paws – so keep your cat indoors during and after use.

## Flea collars and spot-ons from the pet shop

These are a common cause of poisoning in cats. Flea control products from the vet are both safest and best. If you use a pet shop or supermarket product, follow the directions and make sure that you do not use a product meant for dogs, or for treating the house, on your cat. Contact with dogs that have been recently treated with permethrin or pyrethroid-based flea products (containing chemicals such as phenothrin and etofenprox) can also be dangerous for cats. Remove flea collars before you apply any other flea treatment. Do not use any two types of flea treatment together unless recommended by your vet. Signs of poisoning include shakiness, dribbling and fits. Contact the vet immediately.



## Out of the frying pan and into the fire...

Be careful when you are cooking – it is easy to trip over a pet and accidentally spill something hot. Cats can jump up onto hot surfaces or chip pans, so keep your cat out of the kitchen when you are cooking. Cats are naturally interested in human activity and accidental spills of hot fat or oil and boiling water can cause horrific injuries that can leave permanent damage.

The ingredients of some human foods can also cause problems. Onions and garlic can sometimes be poisonous, whether cooked or raw, as can raisins and grapes. It's best to avoid feeding these at all, even in small quantities.

Like people, cats are vulnerable to carbon monoxide poisoning. This colourless, odourless gas is present in car exhausts and the fumes of incorrectly maintained fuel-fired heaters. If your cat sleeps next to the boiler, make sure it is regularly serviced.

Signs of carbon monoxide poison include drowsiness, lethargy and weakness.

Remove the patient to fresh air immediately and go to the vet.

## Every cat owner knows that cats are strange and wonderful creatures

Cats are not humans. The way their bodies work is very different, and the way in which their bodies process many types of chemicals is unique. They are also much smaller, so the relative dose – the amount of drug per kilogram bodyweight – is much greater. Many human medicines are poisonous for cats – especially painkillers and antidepressants. Small quantities can kill. This also applies to some herbal products, including commonly used items such as tea tree oil and citrus oils. There is also concern that long-term use of garlic may cause problems.

Always read the label before you give your pet any medicines. Never give your cat human medicine and put them away so they cannot be chewed. Painkillers such as ibuprofen and paracetamol are particularly dangerous.





Vitamin and mineral supplements can also be dangerous, particularly iron tablets and products containing zinc. Only ever give your cat medicines that are designed and licensed for use in cats. Products meant for use in dogs can be extremely dangerous to cats.

It is best to always seek veterinary advice before giving any treatments to your pet. Follow the label instructions carefully and phone the vet if you are not sure what to do, or if you think the medicine may be causing problems. Be particularly careful to dose accurately if your cat is on painkillers for conditions such as arthritis. Measure liquid medicines with the syringe or dropper provided. "One tablet twice a day" does not mean two tablets together in the morning. Be especially careful with "palatable" tablets designed to be tasty – cats can find them all too tempting! Remember to keep these medicines out of reach of children as well.

Cats are very sensitive to mouth irritation, and can react dramatically to "nasty tastes", becoming agitated and salivating (dribbling) or even vomiting. This may be seen following licking of areas where flea products containing selamectin, fipronil, pyriproxipen or imidacloprid have been applied. These chemicals are of low toxicity but don't taste very nice. The problem is easily avoided by correct application where the cat cannot lick, at the base of the skull. Keep treated cats separate until the application is dry.

## **I think my cat has been poisoned...**

If you think your cat has eaten something dangerous, contact the vet immediately (phone the emergency number if necessary). Have any packaging to hand so that you can tell the vet exactly what the substance is. Do not try to make your cat sick without asking the vet. If your cat is staggering or having a fit, clear obstacles out of the way, and make the room dark and quiet.

However, many illnesses can look like poisoning – such as kidney disease or severe gastroenteritis. Both of these can have a sudden start. Unless you have an idea of what poison is involved, it is not normally possible to identify it by taking samples from an animal. If you have seen your cat chewing something, take samples along to the vet.

# Happy, healthy pets

**Blue Cross** advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)

**Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:**

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

**Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.**



## Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

## How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

**Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk)**



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