



FACTSHEET

Hazards for your cat

Even if you are a responsible cat owner who curfews their cat, or has an indoors-only cat, there are a number of hazards that are potentially dangerous for your cat.

Poisonous chemicals

Everyday chemicals we use around the garden can be hazards to your cat. If ingested, rat bait, snail bait, car antifreeze and some insecticides can cause toxic reactions or even death. Chemical burns can also occur if some of these chemicals get on the fur. Always read the label of any chemical you use and ensure it is put away in a place your cat cannot reach. Remember cats like high places so a shelf up high is not always the safest place. Also remember most human medications can be toxic to your cat, so always put them safely away in a cupboard your cat cannot access.

Other cats and dogs

Most neighbourhoods have irresponsible cat owners who don't curfew their cats at night, as well as stray or feral cats. The stray or feral cats may not be seen in the day but they will come out at night to find food. As most of these cats are undesexed they will fight with each other, and your cat, for territory. Abscesses from fights can be dangerous for your cat's health. Feral and stray cats can carry diseases such as Feline Aids, Feline Immunodeficiency Virus and Cat flu that can all be passed on to your cat. Internal and external parasites can also be passed in faeces left by the stray cat or live in the dirt in an area the stray cat has left faeces in.

It is very important that your cat is desexed to prevent them from straying outside your property to find a mate, or fight over territory. Desexing your cat will also reduce the likelihood of other cats wanting to come on to your property.

You should also be aware of dogs that may be in the neighbourhood who might attack your cat. Injuries from dog attacks are very common and can be fatal. This is even more important if your cat is used to your own dogs as the other dogs may not be friendly.

Wildlife

Not only can your cat be a hazard to native wildlife but the wildlife can also be a hazard to your cat. If your cat does go outside, you should provide deterrents such as bells on the collar, or reflector collars, to avoid your cat catching or killing birds and small mammals. Your cat can catch diseases such as toxoplasmosis and parasites by eating wildlife they have killed. Your cat can also be at risk of becoming injured by foxes and possums at night. Some brushtail possums can be the size of an adult male cat and can cause serious injuries to your cat if they fight.

Poisonous plants

There are a number of common plants that can be toxic or poisonous to your cat. One of the most poisonous is the Lily family. Even the smallest amount of this plant ingested by your cat can cause severe liver damage. Other plants to watch are:

- Marijuana (illegal) - can cause vomiting, central nervous system damage, diarrhoea, seizures and coma
- Sago Palm - the seeds contain the largest amount of toxin, all parts are poisonous. Can cause liver failure, seizures, vomiting and diarrhoea
- Oleander - all parts considered toxic. Can cause abnormal heart function, hypothermia and death
- Tulip bulbs - the bulb contains toxins that can cause vomiting, drooling, convulsions and cardiac abnormalities
- Azalea/Rhododendron - ingestion can cause depression of the central nervous system, drooling, vomiting, weakness and ultimately lead to coma or death
- Cyclamen - the highest concentration of poison is found in the root of the plant. If consumed can cause gastrointestinal irritations, vomiting and potentially death
- Yew - can cause central nervous system damage, trembling, incoordination, cardiac failure and death
- Chrysanthemum - can cause drooling, vomiting, diarrhoea, and depression if eaten
- English Ivy - can cause vomiting, abdominal pain, hyper salivation and diarrhoea if ingested
- Autumn Crocus - ingestion can cause bloody vomiting, swelling of the mouth, shock, organ damage and bone marrow suppression
- Pothos - can cause irritation and swelling of the oral tissue and parts of the gastrointestinal tract
- Peace Lily - if ingested can cause drooling, vomiting, difficulty swallowing, irritation of the lips and mouth
- Easter Lily - ingestion can lead to kidney failure
- Poinsettia - can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, blistering of the mouth, difficulty breathing
- Mistletoe - eating of berries can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, blistering of the mouth, difficulty breathing
- Cactus - spiky cactus can cause punctures in the skin and infections if the spikes become lodged under the skin. This can be extremely painful
- Seeds - the seed of any plant can cause obstructions in your cat's throat or intestines if eaten
- Tobacco - contains nicotine, which affects the digestive and nervous system. This can result in rapid heart rate, collapse, coma and death.

If you suspect your cat has eaten a hazardous plant you should take your cat (and if possible, a part of the plant) to your vet immediately. This is only a guide to some of the hazardous plants; always check with your nursery if you are planting a new plant, or are unsure whether the plant is pet-friendly.

Food

Not all the food we consume is safe for your cat to eat. Ensure all food scraps are placed in the bin or away from your cat's reach. Remember cats can jump onto things like the table or kitchen bench so make sure your cat cannot get to the food.

Some of the foods cats shouldn't eat are:

- **Milk**

You should only give your cat milk made for pets as these contain no lactose. Most cats are lactose intolerant so giving them milk can cause diarrhoea, vomiting and in severe cases, your cat can go into shock

- **Chocolate, coffee or caffeine**

Any food containing caffeine can be toxic to your cat, causing heart and nervous system failure

- **Grapes or raisins**

If eaten can cause damage to the cat's kidneys

- **Mouldy or spoiled food**

Any food, including cat food, that has spoiled should be immediately placed in the bin. If your cat eats this food it can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and organ damage

- **Mushrooms**

If eaten can cause shock and even death of the cat

- **Onions and garlic**

If eaten can cause damage to the red blood cells and cause anaemia

- **Cooked bones**

Cooked bones from any meat can splinter when your cat eats them, causing damage to the throat, stomach or intestines. This can then lead to obstructions in the airways or bowels causing severe distress, and sometimes death. Raw chicken wings are suitable for cats but do keep an eye on your cat even when they're eating raw bones

- **Yeast**

Yeast can swell after the cat has eaten it causing gas in the digestive system. This can cause pain and discomfort to the cat and may rupture the stomach or the intestines

- **Sugary or fatty foods**

Just as with humans, eating too many sugary or fatty foods can cause obesity in cats. Obesity can then lead to dental problems and diabetes

- **Potato and tomato (especially tomato leaves)**

Both of these foods can cause digestive, urinary and nervous system problems in your cat

- **Table scraps**

If eaten in large amounts can lead to vitamin deficiencies in your cat as they are not nutritionally balanced

- **Dog food**

Dogs and cats need different nutrients to have a healthy life. Make sure you feed your cat 'cat food' to avoid vitamin deficiencies. If your cat eats small amounts of your dog's food this is ok but ensure at least 90 per cent of your cat's diet is 'cat food'

- **Fruit and vegetable seeds**

These can get caught in your cat's throat and cause choking.

Other People

Unfortunately not all people love animals, and tragically many cats are victims of cruelty. You need to consider this if you let your cat roam. Also, your neighbors may not appreciate your cat sleeping on their verandah or using their garden as a litter tray.

Traffic

A majority of traffic incidents involving animals occur at night. You should always keep your cat indoors at night. Accidents can also occur in your driveway if your cat runs out to greet you when you get home, or falls asleep under your car.

Toys

Always check your cat's toys. Throw away any that are broken or damaged as they can cause a choking hazard for your cat.

Be careful if playing with string or wool with your cat as many cats will chew on the string/wool and eat it, causing bowel obstructions. Cats are naturally very curious so also be careful with small pieces of plastic, paper clips or elastic bands that may be in reach of your cat. Bowel obstructions are very painful and may require surgery. If you suspect your cat has eaten any of these objects, call your vet immediately.

Also watch electrical cords that may be in reach of your cat as some cats like to chew on these. This can become a serious hazard for you, your home and the cat.

Insects

Just like humans, some cats can have an allergic reaction to bee stings and spider bites. This may cause swelling and irritation around the wound site. You should get your cat immediately to your vet if you suspect an insect or spider bite as they can cause shock or death to some cats. If possible, take the insect with you to the vet for more accurate diagnosis and treatment.

Weather

In cold weather you will need to keep an eye on your cat near heaters and fires. Hot embers from fires can burn your cat. Exposure to heaters for a long period can cause your cat to become dehydrated.

In summer, your cat can easily dehydrate in the hot weather. Always ensure plenty of fresh water is available and easily accessible for your cat. Your cat can also get sunburn. If your cat has a white coat, nose or ears try to keep them indoors for the hottest part of the day or apply pet sunscreen to avoid sunburn. **Do not use sunscreen intended for humans on cats.** Always check your cat for any redness or dryness of the skin after being in the sun. If you do notice sunburn you should get your vet to check it as sunburn can lead to skin cancer. If you have a swimming pool, to prevent your cat drowning make sure there is an area your cat can climb out from if they fall in.

If possible try and keep your cat indoors, or have a secure outdoor area for them and many of these hazards will be reduced. A do-it-yourself guide to cat enclosures and cat proof fencing is available free from our website.

Having a cat is a very rewarding experience: being mindful of all the hazards that exist for your cat will ensure the experience is a long and happy one.