



## 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 and home 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 that your cat cannot access.

**Permethrin** is a common synthetic insecticide often billed as 'safe' – it is **highly toxic, often deadly for cats**. Its toxicity in other mammals is not so great which is why it is often (misleadingly) promoted as 'safe'. It is a common ingredient in flea treatment for dogs and many cats have been killed by the misuse of such flea treatment on cats, or by cats ingesting the chemical from a treated dog (e.g. by grooming them). If you have a dog, talk to your vet about flea treatments for your dog that do not have permethrin. **Never use treatments intended for dogs on your cat.** *Pyrethrum* is the plant source (chrysanthemum) of the naturally occurring insecticide pyrethrin. While 'natural', in high doses pyrethrum/pyrethrin can still be toxic to people and animals and is harmful to bees, birds and fish. Using mechanical methods for pest control (e.g. insect screens) is much safer for your pets and the environment. Remember, arsenic is natural – that doesn't make it safe.

#### **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. Installing cat-proof fencing will keep your cat on your property and other cats out.

You should also be aware of dogs that might be in the neighbourhood who could 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 as 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 injury 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. Your cat should always be curfewed from dusk to dawn.

## 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, but all parts are poisonous. Can cause liver failure, seizures, vomiting, and diarrhoea
- **Oleander** - all parts are 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 coma or death
- **Cyclamen** - the highest concentration of poison is found in the root of the plant. If consumed it 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, and irritation of the lips and mouth
- **Easter Lily** - ingestion can lead to kidney failure
- **Poinsettia** - can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, blistering of the mouth, and difficulty breathing
- **Mistletoe** - eating of berries can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, blistering of the mouth, and 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. Be careful of curious cats when gardening; bulbs and roots can often be the most poisonous part of a plant.

## 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. Avoid leaving wet cat food out for too long to avoid it spoiling. 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 as a treat (no more than twice a week) but do keep an eye on your cat even when they're eating raw bones as the bone can still splinter
- **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 do discourage them and ensure at least 90 per cent of your cat's diet is 'cat food' – look for food that is labelled 'complete and balanced'. Foods labelled 'complementary' are essentially treat foods and should not form the basis of your cat's diet
- **Fruit and vegetable seeds** - These can get caught in your cat's throat and cause choking.

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### **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 might 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. Only use fishing rod or teaser type toys with your cat when you are home, they can get tangled around your cat's legs or throat and cause injury.

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.

### **Ticks**

Ticks are small pinhead-size blood sucking parasites that can latch onto your cat and make them very sick. While it is more common to find ticks on a dog, recent vet reports have found more and more cats with ticks. They live in long grass, like hot and humid conditions, and can be found in both city and suburban areas. A regular check of your cat, by running your hands over their body, will help you find whether there are any ticks present. A tick on your cat will feel like a wart. Signs to look out for are any type of paralysis, lethargy, or lack of appetite. It is extremely important if you do suspect your cat has a tick that you take them to a vet as soon as possible. If you live in an area that is known to have ticks speak to your vet about tick prevention treatments. Never use dog tick prevention treatments on your cat as these can be fatal.

## **Snakes**

Snakes like to hide and lay eggs under wood piles and junk piles. During warm weather they like to sun themselves to keep warm. Snakes can be found in any area, even the inner city, and one bite from a snake can be fatal to your cat. Brown snakes and red belly black snakes are the most common. To prevent snakes coming into your garden, try removing any rubbish or 'junk' piles that accumulate. If you have a wood pile for a fire, move it around from time to time to prevent snakes making a nest in or under it. If you do suspect snakes are in your garden, you can call a pest control company to investigate or call WIRES if you actually see a snake. All native snakes are protected by law in NSW.

Signs that your cat may have been bitten are drooling, dilated pupils, vomiting, muscle tenderness, and coma. Bite marks are not always visible. If you suspect your cat has been bitten by a snake, seek veterinary treatment immediately.

## **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. For more information see our factsheet [Cat-Proof Fencing & Enclosures](#).**

**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.**

*While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.*