

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*



## HIDDEN DANGERS



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

*“Prevention is better than cure” – and sometimes accidents can be avoided. Try to think ahead and foresee dangers, for example, by keeping household chemicals in a safe place. Dogs cannot think about the consequences of their actions – but you can think for them! Read through this leaflet to learn about common dangers and their consequences, often treated at Blue Cross animal hospitals.*



Among the most common problems are injuries following road accidents or dog-fights, and illnesses resulting from swallowing objects, medicines or household chemicals.

If you think your dog has eaten something dangerous, contact the vet immediately (phone the emergency number if necessary). Keep any packaging so that you can tell the vet exactly what the substance is. Do not try to make your dog sick without asking the vet. If your dog is staggering or fitting, clear away obstacles so he cannot hurt itself, and make the room dark and quiet.

## Accidents out and about

- Traffic is one of the greatest dangers. Never let your dog out on his own. However well behaved your pet, always have your dog on a lead near the road. Train your dog to come when called (*see the All About Pets leaflet, Training (D16)*). This is useful to get him away from potential hazards.
- Neutering reduces the risk of roaming – causing accidents – for both sexes, and also has health benefits (*see the All About Pets leaflet, Basic Healthcare (D6)*).
- Get your dog used to being with other dogs from an early age (*see the All About Pets leaflet, Socialising (D17)*). A dog that does not know how to “introduce himself” properly is more at risk of being in a fight. Many vets now run “puppy socialisation classes” where young dogs can learn to make friends even before their vaccinations are complete and these are an excellent idea.
- Have regular (at least annual) check-ups at the vet. This visit may pick up hidden problems. It is better for the vet to discover that your dog has a heart problem than to be stranded on a weekend walk in the middle of the countryside with a semi-collapsed dog.
- Dogs love to chase sticks. However, catching a stick the wrong way can cause horrifying injuries, which can be very difficult to treat. Throw a plastic but indestructible object for your pet to chase – but choose something too large to swallow. Dog toys are much safer than sticks, easier to throw and more chewy!
- Choose rubber balls carefully. If they are small enough to fit inside the mouth, there is a risk of them lodging in the back of the throat during play and causing choking.
- Bones are not good for dogs. Every year so many dogs end up in vets’ surgeries as a consequence of being given (or finding) a bone. Problems range from a gastrointestinal upset to life-threatening illness if chunks wedge in the gullet or bowel. Give specially designed indestructible chews instead. Put a heavy top on your kitchen bin to prevent your dog getting leftover bones.

- Grass seeds – the ones that look like barley ears – are rarely life threatening, but they commonly enter ears and stick in feet. Check your dog after a walk and remove them. Trim feathered ears and paws so that long hairs do not trap seeds.
- Carry your dog on escalators, as it is easy for their feet to become trapped, and appalling injuries may result.
- Protect balconies or windows as falls may cause multiple fractures or even kill.
- Whenever you see your dog chewing an unidentified item, beware! Every vet knows that peach stones, conkers, sweetcorn cobs, fabric, rubber teats from comforters and chunks of toys or balls may cause a potentially fatal bowel blockage. Protect electric cables – especially if you have a puppy – as chewing these can be fatal.
- If your pet likes swimming, then avoid ponds where algae – a blue-green or green paint-like scum – is growing. Some types produce toxins that can be irritants, or even lethally poisonous. And do not forget that although most dogs like water, not all dogs are good swimmers! Dogs can and do drown in rivers and the sea. Those that have been in “near drowning” situations should see a vet, as complications can develop following inhalation of water.
- It is not only dogs shut in cars that get heat stroke – although dogs should never be left in cars in the summer, even if the windows are slightly open. Vigorous play on a hot day can be enough to bring it on, especially in short nosed breeds such as boxers and Pekingese, or in pets that are overweight. Consider clipping dogs with thick coats.



- Areas of sparse hair are at risk of sunburn. Exposing white-coloured areas of coat to the sun may increase the likelihood of skin cancer. Either keep your dog indoors between 10.00am and 4.00pm, or use a sunblock. Buy a special sunblock from your vet or use unscented waterproof sunblock of at least factor 15. Sometimes vulnerable areas can be covered by a T-shirt.

## **Most accidents occur at home!**

- Keep all cleaning and garden chemicals safely shut away, and keep your dog out of the way when you are using them. Be especially careful with slug pellets and firelighters, as the chemical in these is highly toxic. Antifreeze and de-icer fluids taste sweet, but are also poisonous. Rat poison is obviously dangerous – and eating dead poisoned rats is another way of swallowing it. Many rat poisons are colour coded. If you know the colour of the bait or have the packaging available, tell the vet. Seek advice even if your pet seems unharmed, as the effects are often not immediate.
- As with people, dogs are vulnerable to carbon monoxide poisoning. This colourless, odourless gas is present in car exhaust and the fumes of incorrectly maintained fuel-fired heaters. If your dog sleeps next to the boiler, make sure it is regularly serviced. You can buy carbon monoxide detectors from hardware stores. Signs of poisoning include drowsiness, lethargy and weakness. Remove the patient to fresh air immediately and then straight to the vet.
- Dogs can also suffer from smoke inhalation in house fires. Animals rescued from burning buildings should be taken to the vet for an immediate check-up.
- During and after parties be aware that alcohol and cigarette butts (or illegal drugs) may harm your dog. If there are fireworks, it is not just the flashes and bangs that you should keep your pet away from; fireworks are poisonous if chewed.
- Always read the label before you give your pet any medicines. Never give your dog human medicines and put them away from reach so they are not 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 dog medicines that have been prescribed by the vet. Follow the label instructions carefully, and phone the vet if you aren't sure what to do. "One tablet twice a day" does not mean two tablets together in the morning. Be especially careful with "palatable" tablets that have been designed to be tasty – dogs can find them all too tempting!

- Read the instructions on flea products carefully. Check that the product is to be used on the animal – never use a spray intended for use around the house.
- Batteries of all types are dangerous if swallowed.
- Always keep your dog away from home products such as paint and varnish removers, rust remover, glues, and fire extinguisher chemicals as they can all cause poisoning. Cosmetic products, such as perfumes and aftershaves contain substances that are harmful if eaten.

## **You are what you eat!**

Keep your dog out of the kitchen when you are cooking. Dogs 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.



Dogs that eat bread dough as it is rising experience initial discomfort as the dough rises in the stomach, and may then be poisoned by chemicals produced as the dough ferments. Homemade playdough can be even more dangerous because of its high salt content.

Well-meaning attempts to encourage healthy bones in big dogs by giving vitamin or mineral supplements have been linked to problems. Particularly if given in excess, some scientists believe that these may actually cause bone and joint problems. If you have a large or giant breed puppy, such as a great Dane, discuss a feeding plan with your vet, as there is some evidence that excessive feeding may cause bone and joint diseases.

Chocolate can be toxic, sometimes in quite small quantities. Dark chocolate, cooking chocolate and cocoa powder, even in quite small quantities can make your pet unwell. Milk chocolate is less dangerous, but can produce symptoms depending on the amount. A medium sized bar eaten by a small dog can be enough – so be wary at Christmas when dogs may chew through wrapping. Symptoms include: vomiting, restlessness, twitchiness and walking difficulties. Some cases are fatal. Raisins, if eaten in large quantities, can also cause poisoning – as can macadamia nuts. Onions – raw, cooked or the growing plants – are also poisonous.

## In the garden

There is an endless list of poisonous plants. It is best to keep an eye on your dog when he is out, and avoid letting him chew on anything. If you see your dog chewing a plant, use a favourite toy as a distraction – chasing and shouting can deter your dog from chewing a potentially poisonous plant. Azalea, daffodil, dieffenbachia, rhododendron and yew are among the more toxic plants encountered. Horse chestnut twigs, leaves, and conkers can also be poisonous.

Garden bone meal – provided that it does not contain fertiliser or insecticides – can cause gastrointestinal upset even when eaten in small amounts. Large quantities can produce a blockage of the bowel. If you are gardening with bone meal, the smell can attract the interest of “dogs that dig”, which may be unfortunate if what you are planting is toxic, such as daffodil or autumn crocus bulbs. Snacking from the compost heap can cause illness – the moulds in decaying compost can produce vomiting, twitching, tremors and worse.

*For further information, see the All About Pets leaflet, Basic First Aid (D10).*

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*

All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit [www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk). Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

## How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at [www.bluecross.org.uk](http://www.bluecross.org.uk).



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

All About Pets, The Blue Cross  
FREEPOST NAT4336, BURFORD OX18 4BR  
[www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk)

Registered charity no: 224392