

PAWS FOR PETS

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LAWN CHEMICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR PETS

MANHATTAN -- Preparing your lawn for spring and summer often involves fertilizing the grass, but are those chemicals safe for your pets? According to Jack Fry, associate professor of horticulture at Kansas State University, most chemicals are harmless if they are applied according to label directions.

"Most of these products are tested and re-tested for safety," said Fry. "There shouldn't be a problem if consumers follow the directions on the container. Most lawn chemical products are as safe or safer than many chemicals we use daily inside our homes."

Watering the lawn after application is required with some products. Other products may require the grass to dry before allowing pets or people on the lawn. Children and animals should avoid direct contact with the chemical.

"It is strongly recommended that all chemicals be stored safely away from kids and animals," Fry said. "We store medications in medicine cabinets; likewise, these chemicals also require safe storage."

If a pet does have direct contact with a lawn chemical, the best thing to do is contact the local poison control office and a veterinarian, said John Pickrell, associate professor of diagnostic environmental toxicology medicine in the department of pathobiology at K-State's College of Veterinary Medicine.

"There are literally tens of thousands of lawn chemicals so knowing the ingredients is a big help to determine what should be done for the animal," Pickrell said. "Most

lawn fertilizers are made from nontoxic chemicals and are usually not a threat to animals as long as they are used according to label directions. If the lawn pesticide does include a toxic chemical, immediate attention should be given to reduce potential toxic problems that may develop."

A pet owner may suspect a pet has directly consumed toxic chemicals if the animal appears "sick." Pickrell suspects exposure to insecticides if the animal has an increased mobility of the gut, symptoms such as excessive salivation or urination, watery eyes or diarrhea, or nervous signs, such as tremors. Exposures to high levels of insecticides can lead to heart and lung problems and possibly death. Veterinarians can treat the symptoms and possibly save the animal's life.

Pickrell said to avoid over-spraying the chemical and water the lawn to help break the chemical before allowing the pet on the lawn. Like Fry, he also encourages fertilizer users to look at the label and to follow the manufacturer's directions.





FELINE DENTAL HEALTH

Feline dental health and the proper care of cat teeth are often overlooked by cat owners when they think of cat health care. Yet caring for cat teeth is the easiest way to prevent a large number of potential problems, including heart, liver and kidney problems.

Plaque, tartar and gingivitis can weaken cat teeth over time, leading to loose teeth, broken teeth and tooth loss. Even one broken tooth or exposed root surfaces can cause your cat pain when eating or drinking. Your veterinarian should be consulted for treatment options.

Cat Health Care and Oral Hygiene

Brushing cat teeth is best started when the cat is still young, but don't presume your older cat won't learn to accept the concept. Cat toothpaste is designed to be tasty, so if you're lucky, he'll see brushing as a pleasurable activity.

Choosing healthy cat treats and feeding cat food designed to address dental health, along with regular veterinary examination, is the best strategy for ensuring your cat's pretty smile.

The Benefits of Cat Dental Care

Want to be proactive about your cat's health? Take care of those cat teeth. Tooth decay, broken teeth and abscesses can affect a cat's ability to feed itself. Bacteria in the mouth can spread to major organs through the bloodstream. By following a cat dental care program you may be avoiding heart, lung and kidney problems.

Feline Dental Care and the Internal Organs

Keeping your cat's teeth clean and healthy may have far-reaching consequences, especially as they age. It's normal for a cat's mouth to contain bacteria, but gingivitis can result when plaque and tartar accumulate and the accompanying bacteria infects the cat's mouth.

Studies have shown that bacteria can travel from the mouth through the bloodstream and infect the heart and other internal organs. A geriatric cat's heart, kidney and other organs typically lose some ability to function with age, and bacteria from the mouth can add to this deterioration. Maintaining healthy teeth and gums helps maintain a healthy body.

Putting Things In Perspective

If you're not convinced that cat health care should include a cat dental plan, consider this. A three-year-old cat's age is about equivalent to that of a twenty-year-old human's. Imagine twenty years of never brushing your teeth. Twenty years without any dental checkups or dental work done on problems. Kinda makes you want to brush your teeth, doesn't it?

Cat Dental Warning!

If you've get the sudden urge to brush cat teeth (and who doesn't?), make sure you use *cat toothpaste*. Ordinary toothpaste isn't healthy for felines to swallow (since you're unlikely to be successful in teaching her to spit) and besides, I doubt they'd like the taste much!

Dental Care and Toothpaste

Before you run off to grab a cheap tube of toothpaste, consider this about your cat. Dental health maintenance does differ from species to species. Toothpaste used by humans can easily make a cat very sick: it just isn't designed for them. Besides, how many of the cats you know enjoy that minty-clean taste? Cat toothpaste is designed to consider the cat's special dental needs, and their sense of taste.



NOT JUST CAT TEETH: ORAL HYGIENE & YOUR CAT

When you examine your cat's mouth, teeth aren't the only things you should inspect. While this site has concentrated on cat teeth, other health problems show up in the mouth. Regular examinations and knowing what to look for can help you identify rodent ulcers, feline acne and the early development of cancerous cat tumors in the mouth.

Rodent Ulcers in Cats

No, rodent ulcers (also called *eosinophilic ulcers*) in cats aren't something your cat catches from eating mice. Rodent ulcers are open sores that most often appear on the cat's upper lip. The ulcers have a hollowed out appearance, and can spread if untreated. In advanced cases, the sores can spread over the entire lip and into the mouth itself, causing great discomfort. Rodent ulcers in cats are usually treated with anti-inflammatory medication.

Cat Tumors

Cancerous cat tumors are relatively rare in the mouth, but they do occur. *Squamous cell carcinoma* is by far the most common of cat tumors that occur in the mouth. They can be treated either by chemotherapy or surgical removal. The tumor may resemble an unhealed sore, or simply be an area of apparent swelling.

Feline Acne

If your cat develops pimples and blackheads on his chin, chances are good he's got feline acne. The condition is caused by infected hair follicles in the area of the chin where a cat's grooming efforts is not particularly effective. Normally, the condition isn't serious. It is typically treated with antibacterial shampoos and perhaps antibiotics.

Occasionally, feline acne is an indication of an allergic reaction, most often to plastic. Contact with plastic feeding bowls may cause irritation of the chin. Switching to metal or ceramic feeding bowls usually solves this problem.

AVOIDING PETS MAY NOT PREVENT ALLERGIES



Just in case animal lovers needed another reason to adopt a pet, new research provides one. According to a study published in the October 2003 peer-reviewed *Journal of Allergy & Critical Immunology*, researchers found evidence to counter the previously held theory that increased exposure to cats & dogs leads to frequent allergies in children.

Dr. Eva Ronmark & her colleagues from the Obstructive Lung Disease in Northern Sweden Study Group & the University of Virginia at Charlottesville studied 2,454 Swedish children, ages 7 to 8 years. The children were given allergy skin tests in 1995 and 2000, and their parents completed questionnaires regarding risk factors for all five years.

The study found that keeping animals at home was not related to an increased risk for sensitization development in children ages 7 to 11—despite cat allergen's status as the most common allergen of sensitization.

Children who continually owned cats & dogs developed fewer allergies to the animals, compared with new pet owners & those who had only been exposed earlier in life. Among the children allergic to cat dander, 80 percent had never kept a cat at home.

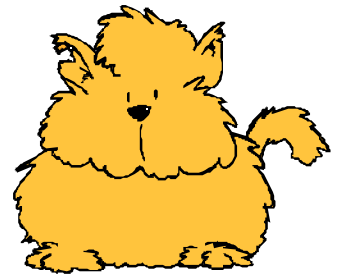
THE GROWING SHAPE OF PETS

Ducks are squawking that their trademark quack has been co-opted by growing numbers of non-fowl waddlers. The National Academy of Science's National Research Council found that one in four dogs and cats in the Western world are obese.

Pets' waddles mirror the widening walks of their human guardians; nearly two-thirds of people living in the United States are overweight or

obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Of course, obesity in animals and humans increases the odds that a debilitating disease will eat away at quality of life. Bottom line: Pet owners need to keep those fat cats out of the pork barrel.



ALLERGIC TO KITTY?

About 6 million other Americans have cat allergies, and one out of every three actually lives with Whiskers in the house!

What sends people into sneezing fits are two proteins (Fel d 1 and cat albumin) from the cat's sebaceous and anal glands. These proteins are shed along with tiny particles of cat skin scales and hair. Inhaling them causes irritation to the airways, resulting in itching, sneezing, and (sometimes) asthma. Stroking Whiskers and getting the dander on your hands can trigger a skin allergy.

So what do you do? Try giving Whiskers a bath. Dogs are no strangers to grooming and doggie baths—but a wash job for your cat? "Yes," says Judith Woodfolk, M.D., research associate in the Asthma and Allergy Disease Center at the University of Virginia. "Cats washed in a tub with soap and water on a weekly basis showed almost an 80 percent decrease in dander. But as soon as you slack off, the dander's back to the levels that trigger allergy attacks."

You're also going to have to put in place some stringent housekeeping habits. The most important allergy survival rule is this: No cats in the bedroom. Even if you cringe at the thought of putting up with your kid's bereft wailing about not being able to sleep without Whiskers tucked in securely beside her, do not

weaken or give in! Allergists are unanimous in insisting that you keep at least one "safe" room in the house where the allergic person can retreat without encountering cat dander.

The best thing you can do is to install an air purifier with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter in the bedroom. Take a close look at your vacuum cleaner, because some can actually make the situation worse by releasing dander and lung-damaging carbon particles from their own motors back into the room. Think about replacing the old job with one that has a tightly sealed system and a built-in HEPA filter. Of 11 vacuum cleaners tested by the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, only the Miele (a pricey machine that has such a system) did the job, retaining almost all the allergens. If that's not an option, take out the bedroom carpet; carpet holds onto 100 times more allergens than linoleum, wood, or tile flooring does.

The good news about living with cat allergies is that allergy shots are improving. A new one is in development by Genentech that blocks allergic reactions by neutralizing the allergy-causing antibodies. Unlike those already in use, this immunization will provide permanent protection. You may soon be able to truly say adieu to allergies—good news if you love cats but not the things they do to your nose and throat.

DECLAWING: IMPERATIVE OR INHUMANE?

A Viable Option

Many animal welfare organizations maintain that declawing a cat is inhumane. While it's a respectable opinion, others feel that declawing a cat is a viable option if all other methods of persuasion fail. Making the decision to have your cat declawed can be agonizing.

After months of training failed to get them to use their posts, clients choose to have their cats declawed. They recover from the surgery rapidly, and not a sign of change in their demeanor or personality.

We do not recommend having an outdoor cat declawed, because you take away his primary means of defense and greatly reduce his ability to climb and escape predators. Outdoor cats need their claws. And they sharpen them on trees, thereby decreasing the necessity to use your furniture.

With more cats living indoors in apartments and city homes or high-rises, the number of requests for declawing is increasing. Indoor-only cats, protected from their natural enemies, do not need sharp claws for defense. In fact, without nails they are less likely to do dangerous things such as climb curtains and screens. (If you don't want to declaw your cat, clipping the nails frequently and providing alternative scratching posts may prevent your cat from nuisance clawing.)

How it works



If you decide to have your cat declawed, have the surgery performed at an early age—3 or 4 months old, if possible. Young cats will recover more easily. Your vet can spay or neuter your cat at the same time, if the vet is comfortable with early-alteration surgery.

The declaw surgery, called *onychectomy*, removes only the nails on the front feet. To get an idea of how the surgery works, take a look at one of your own fingers. There are three small bones (phalanges) in each finger, and the nail grows from the third one, the distal one—the one farthest from the hand. To permanently remove the cat's nail, we must remove the entire third phalanx.

With the cat under general anesthesia, they soak his front feet in an antiseptic soap and rinse with a disinfectant before surgery. A tourniquet is tightened around the leg to decrease hemorrhaging, and the third phalanx of each toe is swiftly amputated using a scalpel blade or

guillotine nail clipper. A single absorbable suture or drop of tissue glue closes the skin over the exposed joint. After surgery, they wrap each foot in a pressure bandage for 24 hours to decrease bleeding. Pain medication is given to the cat before he awakens.

Bandages are removed after 24 hours and the cat is kept at the clinic. This allows an eye to be kept on on them as they clean their feet, and to watch for any postoperative bleeding. After 48 hours many vets discharge the pet and instruct the owners to use shredded newspaper in the litter box for several days, to prevent sandy particles from entering the healing wounds.

Alternatives to declawing

If your cat's nails are causing problems but declawing is not an option for you, here are some alternatives:

- Clip your cat's nails every three to four weeks. If your cat resists pedicures, you might be able to clip the nails of one foot or even one or two nails a week. Or you can pay to have your vet or local groomer clip your cat's nails.
- Provide several high-quality scratching posts to give your pet a choice. Some cats prefer horizontal posts. Others like a vertical pole or an Aframe-style scratcher. Be sure your post has hemp or sisal rope, which the cat can pull his claws through.
- Apply nail protectors to your cat's nails. These are plastic nail guards that you glue right over your cat's own nails. They need to be replaced when they fall off.



We're on the Web
www.CareAnimalHospital.org