



Did You Know?

Timely & informative tips from ASPCA



Poinsettias are not the deadly flowers that popular legend has made them out to be?

Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) are

part of a family of plants known as spurges. During the 1820s Joel Robert Poinsett, the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico at the time, first brought poinsettias to the U.S. from a Mexican city he had visited. It was during the early part of the 20th century that the myth of the plant's toxicity began when the two-year-old child of a U.S. Army officer was alleged to have become ill and

died from consuming a poinsettia leaf.

As a result of this rumor, the toxic potential of poinsettia has become highly exaggerated. In reality, poinsettia ingestions typically produce only mild to moderate gastrointestinal tract irritation, which may include drooling, vomiting and/or diarrhea. Therefore, while keeping this plant out of the reach of your pet to avoid stomach upset is still a good idea, pet owners need not fear the poinsettia and banish it from their homes for fear of a fatal exposure.

Mushrooms

Certain species of mushrooms are considered to be relatively non-toxic, while other species can be very toxic. Of the toxic species, some can potentially cause liver or kidney damage, while others may produce severe gastrointestinal or even neurological effects. Toxic mushrooms can often be found growing right alongside non-toxic ones. Because of this, identifying each type of mushroom existing on your property can be very difficult. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center advises keeping all wild mushrooms out of the reach of pets, and recommends that all wild mushroom ingestions should be treated very se-



riously. If accidental exposures to wild mushrooms occur, seek immediate veterinary assistance by contacting your local veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center.



What To Do For A Poisoned Animal

Be Prepared for a Poison Emergency: Your animal may become poisoned in spite of your best efforts to secure your home. Because of this, we urge you to be prepared. Your animal companion should regularly be seen by a local veterinarian to maintain overall health.

Know your vet's procedures for emergency situations, especially ones that occur after usual business hours. Keep phone numbers for the veterinarian, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, and a local emergency veterinary service in a convenient location.

Poison Safety Kit: Keep a pet safety kit on hand for emergencies. Such a kit should contain:

1. A fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide 3% (USP)
2. Can of soft dog or cat food, as appropriate.
3. Turkey baster, bulb syringe or large medical syringe.
4. Saline eye solution to flush out eye contaminants.
5. Artificial tear gel to lubricate eyes after flushing.
6. Mild grease-cutting dishwashing liquid for the animal after skin contamination.
7. Rubber gloves.
8. Forceps to remove stingers.
9. Muzzle. An excited animal may harm you.
10. Pet carrier.



Call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: (888) 426-4435

A \$50 consultation fee may apply. When you call the center, be ready to provide:

- Your name, address and telephone number.
- Information concerning the exposure (the amount of agent, the time since exposure, etc.). For various reasons, it is important to know exactly what poison the animal was exposed to. Have the product container/package available for reference.
- The species, breed, age, sex, weight and number of animals involved.
- The symptoms your animal(s) is(are) experiencing



Poison Proof Your Pet's Home

Did you know that many substances commonly found in and around your home can be potentially dangerous to your animal companions? Here are some items to watch out for as you poison-proof your pet's home.

Non-toxic substances for dogs and cats: Here are a few substances are considered to be non-toxic, although they may cause mild gastrointestinal upset in some animals.

- Water based paints
- Toilet bowl water
- Silica gel
- Poinsettia
- Cat litter
- Glue traps
- Glow jewelry
- Christmas tree water

Foods to Avoid Feeding to Your Pet

- Alcoholic beverages
- Avocado
- Chocolate (all forms of chocolate)
- Coffee (all forms of coffee)
- Fatty foods
- Macadamia nuts
- Moldy or spoiled foods
- Onions, onion powder
- Raisins and grapes
- Salt
- Yeast dough

Warm Weather Hazards

- Animal toxins - toads, insects, spiders, snakes and scorpions
- Blue-green algae in ponds
- Citronella candles
- Cocoa mulch
- Compost piles
- Fertilizers
- Flea products
- Outdoor plants and plant bulbs
- Swimming pool treatment supplies

Pesticide Hazards

When using herbicides or insecticides in or around your home:

- Always use pesticides in accordance with label instructions.
- Keep pets away from treated areas for the label recommended amount of time.

- Store unused products in areas that will always be inaccessible to pets.
- Be aware that fly baits containing methomyl and slug and snail baits containing metaldehyde are particularly dangerous.

Medication Precautions

- Keep all prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs out of the reach of your pets, preferably in closed cabinets.
- Remind guests to store their medications safely as well.
- Pain killers, cold medicines, anti-cancer drugs, antidepressants, vitamins, and diet pills are common examples of human medication that could be potentially lethal even in small dosages.
- One regular-strength ibuprofen tablet (200mg) can cause stomach ulcers in a 10-pound dog.

Cold Weather Hazards

- Antifreeze: If you think your pet has consumed antifreeze, contact your veterinarian right away.
- Liquid potpourris: Exposure to some types of liquid potpourris can result in severe oral, dermal and ocular damage.
- Ice melting products can be irritating to skin and mouth.
- Rat and mouse bait - place these products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals.

Christmas Tree Hazards

- Christmas tree water may contain fertilizers, which, if ingested, can upset the stomach. Stagnant tree water can be breeding grounds for bacteria, which can also lead to vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea, if ingested.
- Electrical cords - Avoid animal exposure to electrical cords. If they are chewed they could electrocute your pet. Cover up or hide electrical cords and never let your pet chew on them.
- Ribbons or tinsel can become lodged in the intestines and cause intestinal obstruction. This is a very common situation for kittens!
- Batteries contain corrosives, and if ingested they can cause ulceration to the mouth, tongue, and the rest of the gastrointestinal tract.
- Glass ornaments can cause internal laceration when ingested.

Can Pets Sense Pregnancy?

By Nikole Sledd

We don't have scientific proof that pets sense their owners' pregnancies, but I've seen plenty of examples of this in my ten years as an animal trainer.

Your pets probably don't understand that in nine months there will be a new baby joining your family, but dogs and cats do detect differences in your mood, posture, behavior, and body chemistry that clue them in to the enormous change you're going through.

There are other signs your dog and cat will pick up on: They're masters at reading body language, so they'll notice when your movements start to get more awkward. Pets are also highly attuned to changes in your daily routine -- say, if you're not taking your dog for runs as often as you used to, if you're spending more time on the couch, or if family members are treating you with extra care.

It's common for dogs to go on alert and become overprotective of their expecting owner from the very beginning of her pregnancy. I've worked with dogs that growled, barked, or blocked doors with their bodies to prevent other family members -- even the husband -- from coming into the same room as the mom-to-be!

Other dogs will treat their pregnant owner with more attention and care than usual. One woman I worked with had a difficult pregnancy and ended up on bedrest. Her dog refused to leave her side, and had to be forcefully pushed outside to go to the bathroom.

Because they aren't as socially involved, cats are less likely to go through these sorts of behavioral changes. But if they feel neglected, cats may become more aggressive or act out by urinating where they're not supposed to, like in your bed or laundry basket.

To help prevent problem behaviors, try to stick to your pre-pregnancy routine as much as possible. Do the best you can, and ask family members and friends to step in and help when you're not up for a run in the park or a long brushing session. I advise clients to develop a plan for caring for their pet while they're in the hospital, much as they'd develop a birth plan. Make sure to line up a caretaker for your pets and write down your pets' schedules for that person.

To help your dog understand that you still love him, be careful of the messages you send through your body language. Pregnant women often unconsciously place their hands over their stomachs, and dogs read this closed-arm posture as saying "I'm unavailable" or "step back." (Open-armed postures, on the other hand, send dogs the message to "come here.")

If your dog or cat starts seriously misbehaving during **your** pregnancy, or if you don't have experience preparing pets for a new baby, it's a good idea to get help from a professional trainer. Many offer "baby readiness" classes or individual training sessions to help pets adjust.

If you stay on top of any potential behavior problems, having pets during your pregnancy and afterward can be a wonderful thing for you and your baby. Studies have shown that spending time with a domesticated animal can improve mood, lessen depression, lower blood pressure, and even help you live longer. So enjoy!

Nikole Sledd received her bachelor's degree in animal science from Cornell University and has been training animals for more than ten years. She offers private training, group classes, and behavior modification programs for family pets in the San Francisco Bay Area through her Oakland, California-based company, Creature Teachers.

Walk the Dog, Diet Research Advises

BOTH PETS AND PEOPLE SHED WEIGHT IN STUDY

By Marilyn Marchtone—The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS—People looking for a way to lose weight may want to trade in pills for a pooch.

A first-of-its-kind experiment to put people and their pets on a diet and exercise program found that both lost weight and kept it off, though dogs did better than their owners and didn't drive them crazy begging for food.

With 2/3 of Americans and 1/4 of pets overweight or obese, there's huge potential for this novel buddy system, experts say.

"If you're looking for motivation & social support to lose weight, you probably don't have to look any further than the pet in your home," said Robert Kushner of Northwestern Medical School in Chicago, who led the study.

It was funded by Hill's Pet Nutrition, which makes Science Diet and a prescription diet dog food. Results were reported at the national obesity conference.

Kushner, who has done obesity studies for 20 years, designed this one after Hill's asked whether he thought pets could help people lose weight and vice versa.

He and Kimberly Rudloff, a Chicago veterinarian, enrolled three groups: 56 people, 53 dogs, and 36 dogs and their owners.

The dogs ranged from pudgy poodles to husky Huskies. Some

breeds, such as Labrador retrievers, cocker spaniels, Shetland sheepdogs, Basset hounds and beagles are prone to obesity, and the study included many of these.

People attended weekly counseling sessions at Northwestern on diet and exercise, and were encouraged to walk at least 20 minutes and limit calories to 1,400 a day. Dogs were fed the prescription diet, and target weights were set according to "doggie BMI" or body mass index taking into account the animal's breed and age.

All were followed for one year.

The dog owners did slightly better than the dieters who walked and dieted alone. Over all, people lost an average of 11 pounds or 5% of their body weight, in the first four months and kept it off for the next eight. The most anyone lost was 51 pounds. But the diet was less onerous and more fun for the dog-walkers.

The weight-loss for the dogs was even more effective. They lost an average of 12 pounds—15% of their initial weight. One dog lost 35 pounds.

