

10 "Poison Pills" for Pets

Anyone who takes medication prescribed for someone else puts themselves at risk of illness or even death - and this applies to your pets, too! Although there are many medications used in both animals and people, the effects, doses needed, and other things aren't always the same.

About one-quarter of all phone calls to the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC) are about human medications. Your pet can easily ingest dropped pills or may be given harmful human medications by an unknowing owner, resulting in illness, or even death, of your pet.

The APCC provided us with the 10 most common human medication complaints they receive. Here they are, in order based on the number of complaints:

Ibuprofen – Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) is the most common human medication ingested by pets. Many brands have a sweet outer coating that makes it appealing to pets (think "M&M," but a potentially deadly one). Ibuprofen can cause stomach ulcers and kidney failure.

Tramadol – Tramadol (Ultram®) is a pain reliever. Your veterinarian may prescribe it for your pet, but only at a dose that's appropriate for your pet – never give your medication to your pet without first consulting your veterinarian! Too much tramadol can cause sedation or agitation, wobbliness, disorientation, vomiting, tremors and possibly seizures.

Alprazolam – Alprazolam (Xanax®) is prescribed as an anti-anxiety medication and a sleep-aid. Most pets that ingest alprazolam can become sleepy and wobbly; however a few will become very agitated instead. These pills are commonly ingested by pets as people put them out on the nightstand so they remember to take them. Large doses of alprazolam can drop the blood pressure and could cause weakness or collapse.

Adderall® – Adderall® is a combination of four different amphetamines and is used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children. This medication doesn't have the same effect in pets as it does in people; it acts as a stimulant in our pets and causes elevated heart rate and body temperature, along with hyperactivity, tremors and seizures.

Zolpidem – Zolpidem (Ambien®) is a sleep-aid for people. Pets commonly eat pills left on the bedside table. Zolpidem may make cats wobbly and sleepy, but most pets become very agitated and develop elevated heart rates.

Clonazepam – Clonazepam (Klonopin®) is used as an anticonvulsant and anti-anxiety medication. It is sometimes also prescribed as a sleep-aid. When animals ingest clonazepam they can become sleepy and wobbly. Too much clonazepam can lower the blood pressure, leading to weakness or collapse.

Acetaminophen – Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is a very common pain killer found in most households. Cats are extremely sensitive to acetaminophen, but dogs can be affected too. Acetaminophen can cause liver damage. It can also cause damage to your pet's red blood cells so that the cells are unable to carry oxygen – like your body, your pet's body needs oxygen to survive.

Naproxen – Naproxen (Aleve®, Naprosyn®) is an over-the-counter pain reliever. Dogs and cats are very sensitive to naproxen and even small amounts can cause stomach ulcers and kidney failure.

Duloxetine – Duloxetine (Cymbalta®) is prescribed as an antidepressant and anti-anxiety agent. When ingested by pets it can cause agitation, vocalization, tremors and seizures.

Venlafaxine – Venlafaxine (Effexor®) is an antidepressant. For some unknown reason, cats love to eat the capsules. Ingestion can cause agitation, vocalization, tremors and seizures.

As you can tell from this list, a medication that does one thing for people does not necessarily do the same for our pets. And although this may be the list of the medications about which the APCC receives the largest numbers of complaints, remember that any human medication could pose a risk to your pets – not just these 10.

You can keep your pets safe by following simple common sense guidelines:

Always keep human medications away from pets unless you are specifically instructed by a veterinarian to give the medication;

Do not leave pills sitting on counter or any place a pet can get to them;

Do not leave pill bottles within reach of pets (You'll be surprised how fast your dog can chew through a pill bottle.);

If you're taking medications out of the bottle and you drop any of it, pick it up immediately so you know your pet won't be able to eat it;

Always contact your veterinarian if your pet has ingested any medication not prescribed for them;

Never give your medication (or any medications prescribed for a two-legged family member) to your pet without first consulting a veterinarian.

...and last, but not least, always keep the number for your veterinarian and the APCC handy. You don't want to be looking for it in an emergency situation! Feel free to print this page, cut out the box below, fill out the info, and put it in a handy place (or maybe a few handy places).