Tips for a Cat-Safe Home

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make your home safe for cats

In some ways, animals are not unlike children. Just as you would put a gate at the top of a long flight of stairs with a toddler in the house, we must work to keep our pets safe and healthy. For most pets, this means we need to keep certain items away from them. This is especially true for cats, who - with their natural curiosity - are the most vulnerable to household toxins.

Cats lack certain liver enzymes that may help other animals break down toxins. Our feline friends are also very good at hiding the fact that they are ill. Therefore, keeping toxins away from our kitties is vital to their overall health and well-being. To help protect your cat, keep the following tips in mind:

1. Read all labels on pet products carefully. Some are made specifically for dogs and should NEVER be given to or put onto a cat. A good example of this are pet flea and tick topicals. Many products that help protect dogs from fleas and ticks contain permethrin, which is a synthetic insecticide that is extremely dangerous - and potentially fatal - to cats.
2. Keep antifreeze, windshield washer fluid, and other automotive products locked away in a cat-safe cabinet. Many of these products contain ethylene glycol, which has an inviting aroma and sweet taste to pets and children. Unfortunately, it is estimated that over 10,000 pets die each year from accidental ingestion of these highly poisonous automotive products.
3. Lock away all medications, whether they are for humans or animals. Your cat can easily suffer an accidental overdose if left alone with medications for just a few minutes. Plus, since many human and animal medications are compounded with enticing flavors, they are even more attractive to your curious cat.
4. Keep all rodenticides (rat/mouse poison) or insect baits inaccessible to your cat. Many of these products contain hazardous substances, including organophosphates, which may affect your cat's nervous system, reduce blood clotting, and cause internal bleeding.

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5. Ensure all plants in your house and yard are cat-safe. Some plants, such as the popular yew, azalea, and oleander, can cause fatalities if ingested by your cat. Others can cause irreversible damage to the kidneys, liver, and respiratory system. Check the list of household plants toxic to felines, or contact your local environmental protection agency, if you're unsure of the toxicity level of plants around your home and yard.
6. Keep your cat out of kitchen cabinets, linen closets, laundry rooms, and any other location in which you store cleaning supplies. Similar to automotive products and rodenticides, many cleaning supplies contain a mixture of chemicals that are poisonous, caustic, or fatal to felines, including Drano, Ajax, and products containing pine oil.
7. Prevent your cat's access to fertilizers, herbicides, or insecticides. Many of these products use chemicals to kill insects or weeds or promote plant growth in gardens. Unfortunately, while these may help keep your yard free from pests, most are deadly to your cat.
8. Ensure your cat does not ingest any pennies, paint chips, screws, nails, etc. Many of these products contain heavy metals, such as zinc or lead, that are harmful to animals, including cats. In addition, these foreign bodies can become lodged or trapped in your cat's esophagus, stomach, or intestines and cause injury or death. At the very least, many accidental ingestions of such products require emergency surgery for removal.
9. In addition to the obviously poisonous items, our homes are filled with products that can make kitty sick. These products include mothballs, fabric softener sheets, automatic dish detergents, batteries, coffee grounds, alcohol, tobacco, and chocolate.

4 Basic Poison Safety Tips

Cats can come into contact with toxins in a number of ways. They can catch poisoned prey, ingest toxins off of their paws during self-grooming, or simply mistake a penny for a tasty treat. However, the basics of poison prevention all boil down to four simple tips:

- Keep important phone numbers next to your phone or saved in your cell phone, including those of your local poison control office and veterinarian's regular and after-hours lines.
- Keep all products in their original containers so you will be able to quickly identify a suspect substance and its warning label.
- Contact your veterinarian immediately if you suspect your cat has had an exposure to a toxin. Your veterinarian will probably ask you to read ingredients from the label or bring in the packaging and any remaining suspected substances.
- Remember, if a product wasn't specifically designed for your cat to eat or to play with, don't let her eat or play with it.

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