

ACCES for Pet Health

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How to Pet-Proof Your Home

By Beth Davidow, DVM DACVECC



Making your house safe for a pet can be a challenge. Pets are like children in that some are more mischievous than others. My daughter spent her second year standing right next to me all the time talking non stop. My son, on the other hand, spends his time trying to figure out how to get things off of high shelves so that he can put them in his mouth, give them to the dog, or throw them in the toilet. I have seen several dogs who are very much in the mode of my son. One ACCES patient, a 30 lb short dog, somehow managed to get a pound of flour and a pound of sugar off a counter and eat them. Another canine patient opened a cabinet to get chocolate off a shelf.

The things pets choose to get into can be extremely variable. I have seen several dogs who ate items of clothing-one of which was an entire, intact pair of boxer shorts. In two dogs, any socks or underwear left out would be ingested. "Dog proofing" in these households involved everyone making a heroic effort to keep clothes picked up, having closed hampers and keeping the dogs out of the laundry room. Another dog had surgery three times after eating rocks – unfortunately the owners lived on a river bed. That dog had to wear a basket muzzle when outside by himself for his own protection.

Cats are in general a little brighter than this. However, they are extremely agile and able to jump onto the most unusual and seemingly inaccessible places. One ACCES employee had to put baby locks on her medicine cabinet at home because her cats figured out how to open them, climb inside, and chew on the contents.

The biggest hazards for cats (based on patients seen at ACCES) appear to be soft ear plugs (ear wax must taste good if you are a cat), string, ribbon, thread, and rubber hair bands. All of these items should be kept put away and out of reach, especially if you have kittens. Tylenol is extremely toxic to cats (one tablet can be lethal) so it is especially important that pills are not dropped or left out where a cat could find them. Try to avoid playing with your cat using string, ribbon, and thread, because he or she could learn that these items are acceptable for them.



photo courtesy of [ASPCA](#) website

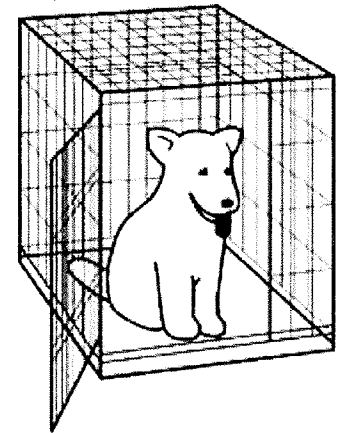
One general rule: dogs should never be trusted with food left out. Counters should be cleared of items you would not want them to eat when you leave the house. Even if it is covered or packaged and you cannot smell the food, a dogs' sense of smell is 25 times that of humans. It's just too tempting for the dog to leave it alone. Even pet food left out can be dangerous if the dog eats enough of it: one patient got into a 25-pound bag of his dog food and ate most of it in one sitting. Eating this much food can cause bloat or pancreatitis, so pet food must be securely stored away.

Medications, human and pet, should also always be put away in closed high cabinets. I have seen several dogs eat large quantities of Advil because the outside coating smells and tastes good. Carprofen chewable tablets, used to treat pain in pets, also tastes very good and I have seen several dogs eat the medication bottle and the entire prescription in one sitting.

Crate training puppies is highly recommended. The crate gives them a comfortable place to call their own, an easy way to make travel easier, and a safe place for them to be when they are by themselves. Many people also use baby gates to contain their dogs in one "dog safe" area of the home.

Explore your house at the level of your pet – this will help you see what things are possible for them to get into. Also, have a family meeting and discuss with everyone the importance of their constant vigilance. Remember that it only takes minutes-or evens seconds-for a pet to get into something harmful. If everyone is on the same page, it is less likely that one person will leave something out for the pet to get into. Never rule anything out that you think "there's no way the dog/cat would be interested in that." The truth is, you never really know so you must constantly be on the lookout.

Make sure you check the list of [poisonous plants](#) on the [National Animal Poison Control](#) website. Many indoor plants are toxic to dogs or cats and need to be put on high shelves or removed completely. Many seasonal plants are dangerous, so it's good to have the list handy for all seasons. Remember that there may be plants out in the yard that need to be removed if the pet is going to be let outside unattended.



Start crate training early to get your dog used to being in it while you're away.

Your efforts at "pet proofing" will allow you to avoid many hazards. Unfortunately, not all problems can be foreseen or avoided so remember to have the number of your veterinarian, the [Animal Poison Center](#), and your [local emergency hospital](#) readily available.

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at November 6, 2008 12:00 a.m.

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