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[CAT VET]



Melissa Catt BVSc MACVSc (feline)
Paddington Cat Hospital
Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine. 210 Oxford Street, Paddington NSW 2021
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DOG FLEA SPOT-ONS IN CATS

As we cat owners all know, cats are very particular creatures, and this is most evident in their susceptibility to many drugs and chemicals. There are many everyday substances, which are highly toxic for cats, and can even kill them. Most people know that cats can't have chocolate or aspirin, but there are many more common substances that cats cannot tolerate, for example onions and lilies, if they happen to ingest them.

There are a number of flea treatments available for dogs, which are unfortunately very poisonous for cats, and every so often we will see a cat that has had accidental exposure to these spot-ons. The most common of these is Advantix, and even though it is clearly labeled NOT to use it on cats, some people either don't see or ignore the warning, or apply it to their dogs from where it can affect the feline members of the household. By far the most common incidence is from the product being applied directly to the cat, but there are a number of cases of toxicity occurring when a dog has been treated with permethrin and the cat either grooms the dog or they have shared grooming tools. It is also possible for cats to be exposed when they inhale the toxin via a flea bomb, so always ensure all animals are out of the house for the day when bombing the house.

The active ingredient is permethrin, which is also present in some other insecticides and flea bombs, so when choosing a flea treatment to use in any of your pets, please ensure it does not contain permethrin in the ingredient list. Permethrin is a type of synthetic pyrethroid (the original ingredient came from Chrysanthemum flowers, incidentally), and acts on the nervous system. It is actually very safe in most mammals, but being the perverse creatures they are, cats are the exception to this rule.

It is likely that cats are unable to metabolise the toxin due to the lack of a particular enzyme in their liver (glucuronidyltransferase). It can then affect the nervous system, particularly the spinal cord, and cause signs such as tremors, drooling and seizures. The cat will require intensive treatment but there will always be a proportion of cats that die from permethrin poisoning, despite the best care. Unfortunately there is no antidote, which means we can only use supportive care like fluid therapy and anticonvulsives. It may take up to a week for full recovery. Another very important part of treatment is bathing the cat, and this should be done (thoroughly and multiple times) as soon as the mistake is realised. Warm water and a gentle detergent are needed, and it may be best done by at the vets, who can also assess any potential toxic effects at the same time.

A study was done in Australia by Richard Malik and colleagues looking at this problem, and they reported 750 cases over a two-year period, with 166 deaths.

Another toxicity we see every so often is lily toxicity, where the cat has ingested any part of a lily plant. This may be leaves, flowers, stems or even grooming pollen off the coat. Lilies are extraordinarily common in flower arrangements in Australia- I know that whenever I buy flowers I find it very difficult to find an arrangement not containing lilies.

The mechanism is not really understood, but lilies cause acute kidney failure and half of the cats we have treated have died from this. The cat will often be just a bit quiet and off food, and it takes careful questioning and an index of suspicion to determine the cause. There is sometimes vomiting, and often the cat is painful for the abdomen to be palpated. Diagnosis is based on exposure to lilies and severe changes to kidney values on blood and urine tests. Unfortunately again, there is no specific antidote, and treatment involves very aggressive intravenous fluid treatment (that is, a drip) to help the kidneys as much as possible.

With cats being intolerant to lilies, permethrin, onions, chocolate, aspirin, Panadol, coffee..... it's amazing we don't see more problems than we do!



the national voice



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