



Keeping cats safe with I.C.C.

Emily Fowler looks at charity International Cat Care's important Keeping Cats Safe campaign, aiming to educate cat owners and keep our cats safe and healthy



As responsible pet owners we do what we can to make sure our cats are happy and healthy but there are so many different possible dangers to our feline friends. Vets all over the UK report problems in their feline patients, including deaths, which are sadly caused by a lack of knowledge around cat safety.

The dedicated feline welfare charity International Cat Care, along with the Veterinary Poisons Information Service (VPIS) and Agria Pet Insurance, launched a fantastic campaign last year that continues in 2016, covering all aspects of cat safety.

The campaign focusses on one specific danger to cats each month, including poisons, diseases and accidental injuries, and the following are just some of the topics that have already been covered:

Lilies (September 2015)

Lilies are beautiful flowers but not every cat owner realises just how dangerous they are to cats, causing severe kidney damage. Even some of those that do know they're toxic to cats believe (incorrectly) that it's only the pollen of the flower that's poisonous. In fact, every single part, the pollen, flowers, leaves and stem, are all potentially fatal if a cat





ingests them. Even the water cut lilies are kept in can be poisonous if a cat drinks it, so it's crucial that cat owners avoid having them in the home at all, whether in bouquets or as a potted plant.

If a cat ingests the toxin that lilies contain, the damage to the cat's kidneys causes a severe build-up of toxins in its body and in some cases might cause the kidneys to fail completely. Kidney injuries of this type are very serious and will lead to death if not treated swiftly.

Symptoms of poisoning include vomiting, lethargy, drooling, refusing food and depression, and when a vet examines the cat they might notice enlarged, painful kidneys. The prognosis can be OK as long as a cat that's eaten part of a lily is taken to the vet immediately and treated immediately. Unfortunately, unless an owner actually sees their cat eating part of the plant, or finds the pollen on the cat's coat, it's not always easy to identify quickly.

Once the cat's taken to the vet, the vet might induce vomiting and give the cat medication to stop absorption of the toxin, giving fluids into the veins to support the cat's kidneys while the poison is flushed out. Unfortunately, if a cat's kidneys are already irreparably damaged, the prognosis isn't good, which is why it's so important that cat owners never have lilies in their homes.

Antifreeze poisoning (November 2015)

The cold winter months increase people's use of ethylene glycol, otherwise known as antifreeze, to try to prevent freezing in cars and garden water features. Sadly, this chemical is toxic to cats and countless deaths happen every year after cats ingest spillages of antifreeze or even lick a drop from a bottle that's been left outside (even the tiniest amount can be fatal). If a cat walks through a puddle

of antifreeze and later grooms its paws, it can ingest the poison that way, and sadly, intentional poisonings have also been reported over the years.

Ethylene glycol poisoning is often so serious that the cat can't survive, as the chemical is broken down in the cat's liver and produces other chemicals that severely damage the kidneys. Signs of antifreeze poisoning include sickness,

weakness, tiredness and a wobbly walk. As the damage to a cat's kidneys progresses, you might also notice extreme thirst, excessive urination and possibly even collapse. A vet will be able to detect toxicity through blood and urine samples, and treatment might include inducing vomiting (as long as treatment is within an hour of the cat drinking antifreeze), or an antidote

to counteract the effects of the toxin. The most frequently used antidote for this is ethanol (alcohol), most commonly in the form of vodka, which might sound bizarre but it's actually an extremely effective method of stopping the poison breaking down into the more toxic form that's going to cause kidney damage. Unfortunately this only works if the cat hasn't already developed kidney damage, which is why it's so important to get your cat straight to the vet if you suspect poisoning.

An alternative solution

Are there any alternatives to ethylene glycol? The International Cat Care website says that 'ethylene glycol is almost universally used as an antifreeze agent, despite being so toxic, and there are few alternatives. It is possible to obtain propylene glycol based antifreeze in some regions and this represents a safer alternative (although more expensive and still not completely safe). The most important thing is for people who use antifreeze to be extremely vigilant, check for leaks or spillages and clean them up, and store containers safely away from animals and children.

Paracetamol Poisoning (January 2016)

Paracetamol is a common medication used frequently by cat owners to manage our own pain but not everyone knows that it's highly toxic to cats. It can come in many different forms, such as tablets,

powders and liquid forms designed for children, and just one tablet can cause death if ingested by a cat.

You might be surprised to hear that the majority of fatalities are caused by well-meaning owners actually giving their cat paracetamol, because sadly it's not common knowledge just how toxic paracetamol is to cats. As a cat's liver breaks down the drug, it produces a chemical which has many serious complications, including severe liver damage and a decrease in the red blood cells carrying oxygen around the cat's body.

Again, unless a cat is taken immediately to the vet, the likelihood is that paracetamol poisoning will prove fatal. Symptoms include difficulty breathing, gums turning a bluish colour, swelling in the face and paws and a fast heart rate. Early treatment of paracetamol poisoning might include the cat being given activated charcoal to try and stop the paracetamol being absorbed and once paracetamol has been absorbed, the aim of treatment is to try to prevent the cat's body breaking it down into more toxic chemicals.

There are many painkilling drugs (analgesics) available for cats, prescribed by vets, and human medicine must not be given to them. If you're worried about your cat being in pain, speak to your vet and only give drugs to them that have been prescribed specifically for them.

Keeping Cats Safe in 2016

You can find out more about the International Cat Care 'Keeping Cats Safe' campaign by keeping up to date with news on their website and Facebook page, where each month's topic will be highlighted and lots of valuable information shared. 🐾



Further Information

- www.icatcare.org/about-us/our-campaigns/keeping-cats-safe
- www.facebook.com/icatcare
- www.vpisinglobal.com
- www.agriapet.co.uk

Every single part, the pollen, flowers, leaves and stem, are all potentially fatal if a cat ingests them.