

SMOKING AND PETS

You already know that smoking has detrimental effects to both your health and the health of those around you, but did you know that it hurts your pets, too?

The residual from smoking is known as Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) or Second-Hand Smoke. Second-hand smoke comes from two sources: that exhaled by the smoker, and that produced at the end of the burning cigarette, pipe or cigar. It contains over 4,000 chemicals, including carbon monoxide, formaldehyde and arsenic, as well as nicotine, tar and cancer-causing agents known as carcinogens.

Not only do your pets inhale second-hand smoke, but they can also lick up toxic chemicals, nicotine, tar and carcinogens that land on their fur after the smoke in the air settles, all of which can increase their chances of developing cancer. Furthermore, accidentally eating nicotine containing products, such as cigarette or cigarette butts, either at home or off the curb, can also prove to be very toxic to your pets (remember, nicotine is often used as an insecticide!). Below we outline the risks of second-hand smoking and nicotine ingestion to several different types of pets, and what you can do to protect the health of your pets.

CATS AND SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Cats are more susceptible than dogs to the detrimental effects of smoking when compared to their canine counterparts, who are washed more often and go outside more frequently. On top of breathing in carcinogenic smoke, cats also groom themselves by licking their fur, resulting in eating carcinogens from the smoke that settles on their body and the smoke particles that get trapped in their coats. As a result, cats in smoking households are most susceptible to cancers of the mouth, known as squamous cell carcinoma. Squamous cell carcinomas are a particularly fast growing and deadly type of malignant cancer, and over 90% of cats diagnosed with cancer of the mouth will die in less than a year.

The other consequence of second-hand smoking for cats is malignant lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes), another deadly form of cancer that kills 75% of cats within

a year of diagnosis. Cats that are exposed to second-hand smoking are 2.5 times more likely to get lymphoma than cats from non-smoking households. Moreover, your cat's risk of developing lymphoma increases the longer and more you smoke. When compared to cats with no second-hand smoke exposure, the risk of developing lymphoma increases to 3 times (of the non-smoke-exposed cat) if the cat lives in a smoking household for more than five years. There is also a 3 fold increase in risk if the pet owner smokes more than a pack a day as compared to cats from non-smoking households. The second-hand smoke induced risks increase to 4 times that of a cat from a non-smoking household if there are two or more smokers in the house.

Finally, it has been found that the constant smoke exposure can also make cats more prone to lung diseases and eye irritation, as well as cause wheezing, coughing, and hyperventilating. Cats can also become

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lethargic and depressed as a result of second-hand smoke exposure.

DOGS AND SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Dogs are also subject to the damaging effects of second-hand smoke. Long-nosed dogs, such as collies, have been shown to be 2.5 times more likely to develop cancers in their nasal cavities as compared to long-nosed dogs in non-smoking households. It is believed that dogs with long noses have more nasal surface area, and carcinogens from the second-hand smoke they inhale deposit here and result in nasal cavity cancers. Dogs that suffer from nasal cancers usually do not survive more than a year.

In contrast, short- to medium-nosed dogs, such as Bulldogs and Pugs, lack the long nose to help filter out the carcinogens from second-hand smoke. Instead, they respond to the carcinogens from smoke like the smokers themselves – it is more directly inhaled, resulting in an increased risk of lung cancer. Indeed, dogs exposed to second-hand smoke are 1.6 times more likely to develop lung cancer when compared to dogs from non-smoking households.

Dogs constantly exposed to smoke are also more prone to lung diseases and eye irritation, and second-hand smoke has been known to cause wheezing, coughing, and hyperventilating, as well as depression and lethargy. Dogs, like cats, will also lick their fur and are prone to the effects of ingesting carcinogens.

DOGS, CATS, AND NICOTINE INGESTION

Equally worrisome for pets of smoking households is accidentally eating anything that contains nicotine, from cigarettes, cigars and chewing tobacco to nicotine gums and patches.

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The usual suspects include puppies and dogs that have the tendency to make chew toys out of anything, whether it's a discarded cigarette they find on the street or your half-used pouch of sweet-tasting chewing tobacco at home, but cats may also find cigarettes and cigarette butts an irresistible pouncing toy that's worth a nibble.

And while the bitter taste of most tobacco may prevent long term chewing, it only takes a little bit of nicotine to cause serious illness or even death of your pet. For dogs, the toxic dose of nicotine is between 20 – 100 milligrams (mg). Depending on the brand, one cigarette contains 15 – 30 mg of nicotine. This means that your pet may show toxic signs after eating less than 1 cigarette!

Even worse, one cigar contains around 40 mg of nicotine, and a nicotine patch can contain up to 114 mg of nicotine. Furthermore, about 25% of the nicotine in a cigarette is left after a cigarette is smoked, so a cigarette butt will contain 4 – 8 mg of nicotine; that means eating as little as 3 cigarette butts may be toxic to your dog.

EXOTIC PETS AND SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Exotic pets, such as birds, rabbits, and rats, have very sensitive respiratory systems, and many are extremely sensitive to any type of pollutants. As such, it is not surprising that they also suffer from the harmful effects of second hand smoking. Living in a smoking household has been linked to increased risk of lung cancer and pneumonia in exotic pets.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR PETS FROM SECOND-HAND SMOKE

The best way to protect your pets from second-hand smoking is to quit smoking. Indeed, if



you've been considering quitting, perhaps now is a good time to do so for both your own health as well as that of your pets.

However, if that is not an option, limiting your smoking to outside of the house will reduce the exposure of second-hand smoke to your pets and other non-smoking household members; don't forget to ask family members and visitors who smoke to do the same when they are in your house. Remember, second-hand smoke contaminates the home and wherever you smoke it, and can last for a very long time, so simply smoking when your pets are not in the house won't protect them. Ideally, you should never smoke in your house, car, or any other enclosed place where your pet may reside. Alternatively, designating a physically separate room as a smoking area may also help limit your pet's exposure to smoke, and provide them with uncontaminated areas of the house to escape from the second-hand smoke.

Regular brushing and grooming will also help remove the residual smoke and toxins that land on your pet, a practice that is particularly important in the case of cats of smoking-households.

Unfortunately, many of the toxic by-products of smoking exist in the form of gas as well as smoke, and it takes several hours to air this out. Good ventilation will help speed up this process, and air filters may also help. However, when choosing filters, stick to HEPA filters (ideally one with a pre-filter to remove large particles), and avoid "ionic air cleaners" or "ionizing filters" as the ozone produced by these can cause breathing irritation for both humans and pets.

To reduce the chance of your pet accidentally eating nicotine, keep all nicotine containing items, including ashtrays, chewed nicotine gum and used nicotine patches, out of the reach of

pets. Remember that used products and ash still contain a lot of residual nicotine. When you take your pets outside, keep an eye on them and do not let them pick up strange objects, such as cigarette butts, off the streets. Also be wary of discarded chewing tobacco, which can attract dogs, as these products are flavored with sugars to hide the naturally bitter taste of tobacco.

Finally, speak to your veterinarian about your concerns, as she may recommend anti-oxidant containing health supplements that may reduce the cancer-causing effects of second-hand smoking on your pets. Smoking owners may also consider bring their pets in for a check-up with their vets once every 4 – 6 months instead of the recommended once a year. Regular teeth cleaning by your vet will also help with the early detection of mouth cancers in cats.

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