

Health and welfare information about your cat from Vetlexicon Felis.



Salt (sodium chloride) poisoning in cats

The chemical name for salt is sodium chloride. Sodium is an essential component of blood and other tissues, but the concentration is maintained within a narrow range. If salt is taken in excess, the blood sodium concentration increases leading to disruption of the hydration status of cells and a shift of water out of cells. This can result in serious cellular damage, particularly in the brain with cellular shrinkage and bleeding.

How much salt is dangerous to pets?

Only a few grams of salt per kilogram of body weight can be hazardous to a pet and signs can be seen with as little as 0.5-1 g/kg. Therefore, even a teaspoon of salt is potentially dangerous in a cat.

Salt can be found in a variety of sources including:

- Table salt
- Rock salt
- Salt dough (home made play-dough) for modeling
- Sea water

- Stock cubes
- Dishwasher salt (for machine dishwashers)
- Baby bottle sterilizing liquids
- (Salt lamps)

What are the potential hazards of salt exposure in pets?

Eating/drinking salt or a salt-containing product can result in a high blood sodium concentration. A very high blood sodium concentration can cause serious toxic effects and may result in death.

The effects of salt poisoning include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Thirst and excessive drinking
- Wobbliness
- Weakness
- Trembling/twitching often starting in the face
- Dehydration
- Stiffness
- Rapid breathing
- Convulsions
- Coma
- Kidney damage

The severity depends on how high the blood sodium concentration is increased above the normal range and for how long.

How do I reduce the risk of salt poisoning in my pet?

- NEVER give salt or saltwater to your pet to make it vomit. Animals have died after administration of saltwater to induce vomiting.

- DO NOT allow your pet to drink seawater, always provide fresh water for drinking. This is particularly important in hot weather.
- Store salt and salt-containing products out of sight and out of reach of your pet.

What should I do if I think my pet has eaten salt?

First, you should remove your pet from the source of poisoning. Then, if safe to do so, remove any suspect material from your pet's mouth. If practical collect a sample of what has been eaten or a sample of vomit, but don't attempt to make your pet vomit.

Then, contact your veterinarian for advice and be prepared to take your pet and the suspect material to the veterinary surgery.

What information will help my veterinarian?

On arrival at the veterinary surgery someone will assess your pet and make sure that its condition is stable before any other treatments are instigated. Your veterinarian will want to know:

- What your pet has eaten or drunk
- How long ago the incident happened
- If your pet is showing any signs of being unwell
- If your pet is receiving any medication or has any pre-existing medical conditions.