

April, 2013 – Pets and Poisons

This spring, I wanted to highlight the good work done by a locally based group of veterinarians and professional staff to prevent and quickly and accurately treat poisoning of our beloved pet companions. The Pet Poison Helpline is available by phone 7 days a week, 24 hours a day to help answer questions about possible toxicity of any number of substances that (mostly) dogs and (sometimes) cats can get sick from ingesting.

It is certainly true that all of us in the veterinary profession have some expertise and access to resources that allow us to determine how toxic an exposure might be and to treat when needed. However, we aren't always a phone call away and the fact is that there is so much new information being released in the form of studies, research, treatment options and so much more that having specific expertise in just toxins is a wonderful and potentially life-saving resource. For instance, those of us owning a dog that has been known to turn a purse inside out, looking for potentially toxic doses of sugarless gum (another good reason to keep that purse off of the floor!) Fortunately when my Mitzi found a treat, it was sorbitol-containing gum – the non-toxic ingredient – not the dangerous xylitol containing product.

Recently, Dr. Justine Lee of the Pet Poison Hotline published a two- part article in Midwest Veterinary Supply (google it if you get a chance) where she discussed the top ten pet toxicities in 2012. Some were, I thought, pretty predictable and involved overdosing of common human medicines (anti-inflammatories, vitamins, cold and allergy medications, anti-depressants and cardiac medicine – not necessarily in that order). We need to constantly remind ourselves that medicines need to be kept in high cupboards that aren't accessible to our pets and not left out even for a short time. Others, like the xylitol-containing chewing gum, chocolate and Tylenol (extremely toxic in cats) weren't necessarily as obvious. For me, at least, the rat and mouse poison that perpetually shows up on these lists is an obvious danger; I think the problem is that folks either don't know it's there until it's been ingested (in a shed or garage they didn't know they had) or they are sure the pet couldn't get to it – until they did.

So.. for a mere \$39 per call, you have at your beck and call a first class professional consulting group that makes it their business to save lives. Call me anytime but keep that number handy for anytime that I can't answer you back in a hurry! And for my part, I will keep the number handy as a much appreciated resource when toxicities are complicated and when an expert opinion is required.