Keep Lilies Away From Your Cats

The white, trumpet-shaped Easter lily symbolizes Easter and spring for many people, and is a popular decoration in homes at this time of year.

If you have cats, however, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) wants to remind you that these particular flowers, as well as Tiger, Asiatic, Day, and Japanese Show lilies, are a safety threat to your feline friends.

Eating small amounts of plants or grass may be normal for cats. But the entire lily plant (leaf, pollen, and flower) is poisonous to them, according to Melanie McLean, a veterinarian at FDA. Even if they just eat a couple of leaves or lick a few pollen grains off their fur, cats can suffer acute kidney failure within a very short period of time.

McLean says that if your cat has eaten part of a lily, the first thing you'll see is vomiting soon afterwards. That may gradually lessen over two to four hours. Within 12 to 24 hours, the cat may start to urinate frequently. Then, if kidney failure sets in, the cat will stop urinating because the kidneys stop being able to produce urine. Untreated, she says, a cat will die within four to seven days of eating a lily.

Young cats typically have healthy kidneys, so when a young cat shows signs of acute kidney damage, consumption of a toxic substance is one of the first things veterinarians investigate, McLean says.

Early veterinary treatment is critical. McLean says that even if you just suspect that your cat has eaten a lily, you should call your veterinarian immediately or, if the office is closed, take your cat to an emergency veterinary clinic. The vet may induce vomiting if the cat just ate the lily, and will give the cat intravenous fluids to prevent dehydration and preserve kidney function.

Other lilies, like Calla and Peace lilies, don't cause fatal kidney failure, but they can irritate your cat's mouth and esophagus. Lilies of the Valley are toxic to the heart, causing an abnormal heart rhythm. If you think your cat has eaten any type of lily, contact your veterinarian.

Lilies are not a great danger to dogs, McLean says. Dogs may have some gastrointestinal issues if they eat a lily, but nothing considered life-threatening.

Does this mean that you can't have lilies in your home if you have a cat? Although it's best not to have them in your home, if you want to enjoy these pretty spring flowers, McLean says to be sure to keep the plant someplace that your high-jumping pet can't reach.

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