TOAD INGESTION

**What is it?** Many dogs and cats become curious about toads they see hopping in the yard, and may try to lick or eat them. In the state of Wisconsin, we have the Eastern American Toad, which is non-toxic. In other parts of the country, there are toxic toads, including the Colorado River Toad, the Giant or Marine Toad, the Western Toad, and the Brown Toad.

**Which animals are affected?** Both dogs and cats can ingest toads. Dogs are the more likely candidates to consume a toad because they use their mouths to play more than cats. However, certain cats are bold enough to attempt to kill and consume a toad, especially if it is a small one.

**What are the clinical signs?** The Eastern American Toad that we have in Wisconsin causes copious hypersalivation (drooling), nausea, and vomiting. If you see your dog or cat eat a toad, these will occur. Your pet may even vomit the toad back up. Drooling and nausea usually subside within an hour and vomiting is usually limited to a few times as they empty their stomach.

Consumption of Colorado River Toad, Giant Toad, Western Toad, and Brown Toad cause more extensive symptoms. Hypersalivation, nausea, and vomiting still occur; however, dependent upon the species consumed, symptoms can be much more serious. Some of these toads secrete substances similar to the heart medication digitalis. Others secrete poisons that affect the blood pressure or cause hallucinations. Seizures are also possible.

**How is it diagnosed?** Diagnosis is usually based on owner observations. Often time, owners will witness their pet mouthing or consuming a toad or may see them vomit the toad or pieces of the toad back up.

**How is it treated?** If your pet has consumed a toad native to Wisconsin, rinse the mouth with water to flush out the bitter tasting secretions from the paratoid gland. This gland is located on the back of the toad’s head, behind the eye, and secretes the substance that makes your pet nauseous. Withhold food and water for a few hours to let the stomach settle. Then continue to feed and water your pet as normal. If vomiting continues even after your pet empties its stomach, supportive care such as anti-emetics (anti-vomiting medications), acid reducers, gastric protectants, or fluids under the skin may need to be administered.

If your pet eats a species in any other state, contact the nearest veterinarian immediately. If the species consumed contains a poison that affects the heart, your pet will have to be hospitalized and its heart rate and rhythm monitored and treated with cardiac medications and fluids as needed to stabilize. Blood pressure will be monitored and corrected, as needed, to keep it within normal parameters. Hallucinations and seizures will be treated supportively.
**What is the aftercare?** Aftercare is dependent upon the species of toad eaten. If the Eastern American Toad is consumed aftercare is usually minimal and may include withholding food and water for a few hours to let the nausea subside or administering anti-emetic or gastric protectant medications as prescribed by your veterinarian. Administer any medication dispensed as directed by the prescribing veterinarian.

If your pet eats one of the poisonous species of toad, aftercare will be dependent upon the toxin released by the species consumed. Your pet may need rechecks of its blood pressure and heart rate and rhythm on a regular basis for a period of time after discharge from veterinary care.

**What is the prognosis?** Prognosis for ingestion of the Eastern American Toad is excellent. Your pet should be back to normal within 12-24 hours. Prognosis for consumption of one of the poisonous toads is much more serious, especially if your pet has an underlying medical condition.

**Can it be prevented?** If your dog is on a leash then yes, it can be prevented. If your dog is let out in a fenced in yard unsupervised, then toad ingestion becomes much harder to prevent. Cats kept indoors can be kept away from them completely.