



Perfumes and Pets – The Nose Knows

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It is a well known fact that dogs and cats have a much keener sense of smell than that of humans, and for good reason. Animals have always relied heavily on their sense of smell for survival; from finding food to locating a mate, establishing territory and identifying enemies. The total nasal organ of cats and dogs is comparatively much larger than that of a human, with millions more sensory cells and a larger proportion of the brain dedicated to olfaction. So how do perfumes and scents made for the pleasure of humans impact our pets? Research on this subject is tricky, because pets can't easily convey the emotions they feel when encountering a scent, but some research has been done on the physical and emotional effects of scents on pets.

Many dog owners have witnessed their dog roll in the grass immediately after receiving a bath. Animals do this in an effort to remove the perfume that covers their own scent, which is an important part of their canine or feline identity. Some dogs and cats are lethargic or won't eat after a large dose of perfumes, because it may cause nausea or dull the odor of food, which is very important for appetite stimulation.

Dogs and cats can also have allergic skin reactions to perfumed shampoos, sprays, and lotions. These can manifest as redness of the skin, itching or biting at the affected area.

Cats are especially sensitive to the respiratory effects of inhaling perfumes. The incidence of feline allergic airway disease has increased steadily since the 1970s, probably due in large part to the increased manufacture and use of scented products.

Not all research has been focused on the negative side effects of perfumes, however. Aromatherapy using the ambient odor of lavender and chamomile has been shown to lessen travel-induced anxiety in dogs and decrease stress in shelter dogs. Ambient citrus scents have been used to ease the symptoms of separation anxiety in cats. HOV is always looking for simple and effective ways to help decrease the stress level of our animals, including using aerosolized pheromones for reducing stress and the use of citrus scent in cleaning products.

Perfumes and scented products must be used judiciously with our pets. Heavily scented shampoos or sprays applied directly to a pet can cause skin reactions, nausea and lethargy, or even airway irritation. Mild ambient fragrances of citrus, chamomile and lavender have been shown to have a calming effect on pets without the negative side effects.