FOOD & PLANTS

Can Cats Eat Onions or Garlic? No, Not Even a Little

No. Onion, garlic, chives and leeks damage a cat's red blood cells and can cause anemia. Cats are the most sensitive species: less than a teaspoon of cooked onion has poisoned a cat, and garlic is stronger still.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 28, 2026 • 4 min read • 6 cited sources

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The short answer

No. Onion, garlic, chives and leeks belong to the Allium family. The ASPCA warns that they can irritate the stomach and damage red blood cells, which can lead to anemia, and that cats are more susceptible than dogs.

The Merck Veterinary Manual calls cats the most susceptible species of all. Poisoning has been reported in cats after less than a teaspoon of cooked onion, and garlic is 3 to 5 times more toxic than onion.

Raw, cooked, dried or powdered, it all counts. If your cat ate any, call your vet or a poison line now: the signs can take days to show.

How onion and garlic harm a cat

Allium plants contain sulfur compounds that are released when they are chopped, cooked or chewed, and by bacteria in the gut. Once absorbed, they damage red blood cells (Merck).

The damaged cells form clumps called Heinz bodies and break apart, a hemolytic anemia that leaves the blood short of cells to carry oxygen. The damage starts within 24 hours and peaks at about 3 days, and the cells usually break down 3 to 5 days after the cat ate the onion or garlic (Merck).

That delay is why a cat can seem fine for days after eating something seasoned, and why you should call before any signs appear.

Form by form

ONION AND GARLIC, FORM BY FORM

Form	Risk	Why
Garlic, fresh or cooked	Very high	3 to 5 times more toxic than onion (Merck)
Onion or garlic powder, dried flakes, dry soup mix	Very high	Concentrated: most poisonings in cats and dogs involve these forms (Merck)
Cooked onion	High	Less than a teaspoon has poisoned a cat (Merck)
Raw onion	High	Reported at 5 g per kg of body weight: about 23 g, under an ounce, for a 10-pound cat (Merck)
Chives and leeks	High	Allium too (Merck, ASPCA)
Gravy, broth, soup, sauces, stuffing, seasoned meat	Often hidden	Many are made with onion or garlic, fresh or powdered

Any amount is worth a call: how much harm it does depends on the form, the amount and the size of the cat.

This quick sheet is the start of the guide. Still to read: Where onion and garlic hide, Signs to watch for, If your cat ate onion or garlic and 3 more sections, plus the What Cats Can & Can't Eat Chart. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/can-cats-eat-onions-or-garlic

Sources

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