

Pets Are Not Small People

Many pet owners treat their pets like family. They live in our houses, sleep in our beds, and sometimes we give them our food. Most vets cringe inside when they hear of pets getting table scraps for treats or bacon and eggs with their owner for breakfast. Think of the calories! Pancreatitis! Gastroenteritis! But there are some human foods that are actually toxic to our pets. These can do a lot more damage than putting on an extra pound. Avoid feeding your pets any of the following foods. If you suspect that they may have eaten any of these foods, please call us immediately.

ALCOHOL: Alcoholic beverages can cause serious toxicity in pets. Food products such as candies with alcohol can also contain enough to be toxic. Signs of alcohol toxicity include vomiting, diarrhea, loss of coordination, and tremors. Severe signs can include difficulty breathing, central nervous system depression, abnormal blood acidity, coma, and even death.

AVOCADO: Avocados, including the fruit, seeds, and bark, contain persin. This compound is highly toxic to many species, including rabbits, birds, and pocket pets. Avocados in these species can cause heart failure. While on the toxin list, ASPCA poison control has not seen much evidence of toxicity in dogs or cats. However, the pit can definitely cause an obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract in dogs.

BREAD DOUGH: Yeast-containing dough ingestion can be fatal to dogs and cats. When eaten, the animal's body heat causes the dough to continue rising in the stomach. Gas production and dough expansion cause severe abdominal pain, bloating, vomiting, and can even rupture the stomach or intestines. Surgery can be needed to remove the dough from the gastrointestinal tract. Ethanol is produced during the rising process and can lead to signs of alcohol toxicity (see above).

CHOCOLATE AND COFFEE: Chocolate and coffee contain methylxanthines, including theobromine and caffeine. Methylxanthines are ok for people, but not for dogs and cats. Side effects include tremors, agitation, hyperactivity, and heart arrhythmias. Severe signs can include seizures and death. Vomiting and diarrhea, increased thirst, and increased urination are also commonly seen with chocolate ingestion. Different types of chocolate contain different amounts of methylxanthines. White chocolate has the least, and baking chocolate contains the most. Chocolate ingestion can also cause pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas). Pancreatitis can cause vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and fever. This condition can vary in severity, ranging from mild signs to life-threatening illness.

GRAPES AND RAISINS: Grapes and raisins have been linked with acute kidney failure in dogs, cats, and ferrets. The toxic compound is not known, but recent data suggests that it is the flesh that is toxic, not the seeds. This toxicity is idiosyncratic, which means that not every pet that eats grapes or raisins will develop kidney failure. Treatment of this ingestion is directed at decontamination (inducing vomiting and giving charcoal) as well as IV fluid diuresis. If kidney

values are normal after 3 days, then the pet will be unaffected. If treatment is started after kidney failure develops, the prognosis is guarded at best.

MACADAMIA NUTS: The cause of this toxicity is also not known, but seems to be specific to dogs. Dogs that ingest macadamia nuts can develop difficulty standing or using their back legs within 12 hours of ingestion. Vomiting, tremors, depression, and elevated body temperature can also be seen. Prognosis is good, with most dogs returning to normal within 24 to 48 hours of ingestion.

MOLDY FOODS: Moldy food can contain compounds called tremorgenic mycotoxins. This toxicity is often seen in dogs that get into the garbage or compost. Tremorgenic mycotoxins can cause severe signs including muscle tremors, vomiting, loss of coordination, elevated body temperature, and seizures. Severe signs can last for several days. Treatment is mostly symptomatic and supportive. Prognosis is good with early, aggressive treatment.

ONIONS AND GARLIC: Onions, garlic, and chives can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and red blood cell destruction. Pieces of onion, onion powder, and cooked onion can all be toxic. Cats are more susceptible to this toxin, but dogs can also be affected. Blood transfusions can be needed in severe cases. An occasional small amount of these foods is often not enough to be toxic, but the ASPCA poison control recommends that pets are NOT given large amounts.

SALT: Ingestion of large amounts of salt can cause severe signs in small animals. Trying to make a pet vomit by giving salt is never recommended. Signs of salt toxicity include vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, elevated body temperature, and seizures. High sodium levels from salt ingestion can directly affect the brain, causing it to shrink and leading to bleeding within the brain. Death from salt toxicity is possible without early treatment.

XYLITOL: Xylitol is a sugar substitute that can be found in many products, including gum, candy, baked goods, and toothpaste. Unlike people, dogs that eat xylitol release insulin into their bloodstream. This can cause life-threateningly low blood glucose. Xylitol can also cause liver failure up to several days after ingestion. Signs of xylitol toxicity include vomiting, weakness, tremors, and seizures. If liver failure develops, clotting problems can be seen. Treatment is directed at supporting the blood glucose level with IV dextrose. Plasma transfusions and more aggressive supportive care can be needed in patients with liver failure. Prognosis is good for dogs that only develop low blood glucose and are treated appropriately. Dogs that develop liver failure have a much more guarded prognosis, with 70-80% of dogs dying.