

TOXIC LOVE...

Dangerous Foods for our Animal Companions

We all love our pets...and food is one of the ways that we have learned to show our love. We also use food to reward our animals for a job well done or “just because”. Unfortunately, some of the yummy treats that people love to munch on can be dangerous or even fatal to our animal companions.

While you may some of the common human foods that might be toxic to our non-human friends, it's always good to have an occasional “refresher”. Also, there may be foods that have only recently been discovered to be toxic, like grapes and raisins, which can cause kidney failure in dogs. The list below may not be totally inclusive, so if you're considering giving a new human food to your pets, you may want to check with your vet first, and/or check online with the ASPCA's Poison Control Center (contact info is below).

Remember, your animal's digestive system may react badly to any drastic change in diet...so even if a human food is not listed here, any changes should be made gradually, and only small amounts of unusual foods (outside of the usual diet) should be given at a time. Animals, like humans, may also be allergic to some foods, so it's wise to watch and see if there is any reaction to a new food. We have a friend with a dog who is severely allergic to peanuts and other nut products, which are in many dog foods and treats; they have discovered how much of a challenge it can be to find food and treats with no peanut products included. Other animals may be allergic to dairy, corn, wheat, and other food stuffs. Please check with your pet's health care provider before making a major change in what you are feeding, or if you have any questions about particular foods.

Foods to Avoid Feeding to Your Pet — and Why:

Alcoholic Beverages (including beer, wine and “hard” liquor) – can cause vomiting, diarrhea, drunkenness (ataxia), central nervous system (CNS) depression, tremors, difficulty breathing (dyspnea), or panting, respiratory failure, acidosis, coma or death. You might even have to look for a 12-step group for your pet (and they can be hard to find)!

Avocado – rabbits, mice and birds are particularly susceptible to poisoning by avocado; other animals may also react negatively. Symptoms seen are respiratory distress, fluid accumulation around the heart, and possibly death.

Chocolate (in all forms, including cocoa powder, chocolate bars, chocolate cake, etc.) – can cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, panting, abnormal heart rhythm, tremors, seizures and death, depending on how much is eaten. Dark chocolate is more dangerous than lighter chocolate, as it has a higher concentration of the substance that is toxic (even though it’s better for us).

Coffee (in all forms) – can have the same results as chocolate, depending on the amount consumed.

Dairy Products (milk & cheese) – many dogs and cats are relatively lactose intolerant. Therefore, too much of any dairy food could cause gastrointestinal upset, including vomiting and diarrhea. If you feel that your cat(s) really need some type of milk, there are products that are specifically designed for cats that you can find at most pet stores. Yogurt, in limited amounts, may not be a problem

Fatty Foods – can cause vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal discomfort. Too much fatty food can also cause inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis), especially in dogs.

Macadamia Nuts – can produce weakness (especially in the hind legs), depression, vomiting, ataxia and tremors. So far, dogs are the only species reported to the ASPCA/APCC that have been affected by eating macadamia nuts.

Moldy or Spoiled Foods – may contain molds that can release toxins, resulting in vomiting, severe tremors, seizures and death. Bacterial toxins in spoiled food may also result in severe food poisoning.

Onions, Onion Powder – can produce vomiting, diarrhea, and may cause serious damage to red blood cells.

Raisins and Grapes – eating these fruits has been associated with acute kidney failure in dogs. Most dogs initially vomit and drink a lot of water. They then develop diarrhea, kidney failure and, finally, death (see further discussion below). Prompt medical treatment is imperative.

Salt – can produce sodium ion poisoning which causes vomiting, depression, tremors, excessive thirst, diarrhea, excessive urination, elevated body temperature, seizures and death if a large enough amount is consumed. There is no need for animals to have salt added to their food.

Xylitol (sugar substitute) – candies, gum or other foods sweetened with xylitol can cause a rapid drop in blood sugar, resulting in life-threatening tremors and possible seizures, as well as the potential for liver failure. Other non-sugar sweeteners such as sucralose (Splenda), aspartame (NutraSweet) and saccharin (Sweet and Low) have not resulted in similar problems (at least in small amounts). However, you might want to think about why you feel your animal's food needs to be sweetened, when it gives no nutrition.

Yeast Dough – yeast-based dough can expand in the stomach as it rises, causing an obstruction or intestinal rupture; it can also form alcohol when it rises, which can cause alcohol poisoning.

More about Grapes and Raisins:

We have recently seen emails about the dangers of feeding raisins or grapes to dogs. While mis-information can be sent through cyber-space, this one is accurate. We did some checking for information about the truth, and wanted to share what we found.

The ASPCA has been aware of the toxicity of raisins and grapes since 1989, and has helped with a number of cases since then. More complete information is available on the ASPCA Poison Control Center (APCC) website, which can be found by going to www.ASPCA.org or directly to [ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center](http://www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro_apcc) website (www.aspca.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pro_apcc). Dogs that they have helped treat have been affected by as little as a single serving of raisins. The ASPCA is unclear about whether repeated small amounts of either grapes or raisins could have as toxic an effect as a larger, single amount. Reported symptoms include vomiting within a few hours of eating the grapes/raisins, diarrhea, intense thirst, loss of appetite and energy and apparent abdominal distress. If untreated, the dog's kidneys may stop functioning, resulting in death. Prompt treatment by a professional, including IV fluids and blood tests, may prevent further injury. If you wait too long, there may be nothing that can be done to help your companion. Many dogs that were treated early have recovered completely. However, this is not something that you can treat at home.

While you probably don't need to worry if your dog accidentally snatches one or two grapes or raisins, it is a good idea to keep them out of your dogs' reach. It certainly is best not to give grapes or raisins as treats, no matter how tasty people (or our dogs) may find them.

If you have grape vines growing in your yard, you may want to consider cutting the fruits off the vine before a problem occurs. Alternatively (or additionally), close supervision in a yard with grape vines may also prevent injury to your companion.

Poison Control Information

Hopefully, neither you nor your vet will ever need to use a poison control center for your animals (or for you!) In case you do, it might be helpful to know that the ASPCA has a database (AnTox™) that includes half a million animal medical conditions, including poisons and toxins, that helps identify an animal's symptoms, make a diagnosis and appropriately treat each of those conditions. If you do need an emergency consultation, you can reach the ASPCA's Poison Control Center at **1 (888) 426-4435**. A consultation fee may be applied to your credit card; the call may save your animal's life.



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