

# Human Foods That Are Dangerous for Dogs and Cats

- Some human foods can cause serious illness (and even death) in dogs and cats.
- Pets should not be given human food unless recommended by your veterinarian.
- If you suspect your pet may have eaten a dangerous food, contact your veterinarian immediately.

## What Do I Need to Know About Foods That Are Dangerous for My Pet?

A number of human foods are dangerous to pets. Many of these foods may seem tasty to our pets but can prove deadly if eaten. It can be very tempting to offer pets food from the table, but pets should not be given human food unless recommended by your veterinarian.

If you suspect your pet may have eaten a dangerous food, contact your veterinarian immediately. In many cases, early recognition and treatment are critical.

### *Xylitol*

Xylitol is an artificial sweetener found in products such as gum, candy, mints, toothpaste, and mouthwash. Xylitol is harmful to dogs because it causes a sudden release of insulin in the body that leads to hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Xylitol can also cause liver damage in dogs. Within 30 minutes after eating, the dog may vomit, be lethargic (tired), and/or be uncoordinated. However, some signs of toxicity can also be delayed for hours or even for a few days. Xylitol toxicity in dogs can be fatal if untreated. It is unknown whether xylitol is toxic to cats.

### *Chocolate, Coffee, and Caffeine*

Chocolate contains theobromine, a chemical that is toxic to dogs in large enough quantities. Chocolate also contains caffeine, which is found in coffee, tea, and certain soft drinks. Different types of chocolate contain different amounts of theobromine and

caffeine. For example, dark chocolate and baking chocolate contain more of these compounds than milk chocolate does, so a dog would need to eat more milk chocolate in order to become ill. However, even a few ounces of chocolate can be enough to cause illness in a small dog, so no amount or type of chocolate should be considered “safe” for a dog to eat. Chocolate toxicity can cause vomiting, diarrhea, rapid or irregular heart rate, restlessness, muscle tremors, and seizures. Death can occur within 24 hours of ingestion.

### *Grapes and Raisins*

Grapes and raisins can cause acute (sudden) kidney failure in cats and dogs. It is unknown what the toxic agent is in these fruits. However, clinical signs can occur within 24 hours of eating and include vomiting, diarrhea, and lethargy (tiredness). Other signs of illness relate to the eventual shutdown of kidney functioning.

### *Avocados*

The avocado tree leaves, pits, fruit, and plant bark are likely all toxic. Clinical signs in dogs and cats include vomiting and diarrhea.

### *Garlic and Onions*

Garlic and onions contain chemicals that damage red blood cells in cats and dogs. Affected red blood cells can rupture or lose their ability to carry oxygen

## Learn More

For more information on human foods that are dangerous for pets, visit the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) Animal Poison Control Center at <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/>.

## Pet Safety

effectively. Cooking these foods does not reduce their potential toxicity. Fresh, cooked, and/or powdered garlic and/or onions are commonly found in baby food, which is sometimes given to animals when they are sick, so be sure to read food labels carefully.

### **Macadamia Nuts**

Macadamia nuts are common in candies and chocolates. The mechanism of macadamia nut toxicity is not well understood, but clinical signs in dogs include depression, weakness, vomiting, tremors, joint pain, and pale gums. Clinical signs can occur within 12 hours after eating. In some cases, signs can resolve without treatment in 24 to 48 hours, but patient monitoring is strongly recommended.

### **Prevention**

Many cases of human food toxicity in pets are accidental. A pet may find and chew on a package of gum or candy, or steal food from a countertop or table. The best way to prevent this is to keep all food items in closed cabinets or in areas that are inaccessible

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to pets. This may be particularly difficult during the holiday season, when more candy, chocolate, fruit baskets, and other food items are around. During these times, increased vigilance can help prevent pets from finding and eating dangerous foods.

Unfortunately, some cases of food toxicity in pets occur when pets are given a human food that contains a dangerous component. In general, human food items should not be given to pets unless recommended by your veterinarian. Children should also be taught to never give candy, gum, or other human food items to pets.

**If you suspect that your pet has eaten a potentially hazardous item, contact your veterinarian immediately.**