



## Sugar Substitute May Be Dangerous to Dogs

If you think it's no big deal that your dog just ate some sugar-free gum or a cookie or two, think again. You may want to make an immediate trip to your veterinarian.

Xylitol, a sweetener found in many sugar-free chewing gums, candies, baked goods and tooth-pastes, is a naturally occurring ingredient that may have far-reaching negative health effects on dogs. Xylitol's growing popularity is based on sweetness equal to sucrose but only two thirds of the calories. It also prevents bacteria in the mouth from producing acids that damage teeth.

Not all things that are natural are safe, there are plenty of things in the environment that are toxic to pets.

While not all pets become ill after eating xylitol, the public—and especially dog owners—needs to be aware of the potential dangers. Pet owners should make sure that products containing xylitol are kept away from dogs. If an owner suspects that their dog has eaten products containing xylitol, they should contact their veterinarian immediately.

The potential for severe illness is very high. From the ASPCA NAPPC database since 2003, eleven dogs that consumed products containing xylitol developed liver failure. All dogs became ill, and while three of the dogs survived, eight of the pets either died or had to be euthanized due to liver failure.

A variety of products were consumed:

- A 3 year old standard poodle had eaten 5-6 cookies.
- A 5 year old Scottish terrier had eaten 30 pieces of gum
- A 6 year old Labrador retriever had eaten 450 grams of xylitol powder.
- A 7 year old miniature dachshund had eaten 100 pieces of gum
- A 4 year old Australian shepherd had eaten 12 cupcakes
- A 8 year old Labrador retriever had eaten 140g of xylitol powder.
- A 6 year old Dalmation had eaten eight muffin
- A 4 year old Welsh Springer Spaniel ate four large chocolate frosted muffins that contained about 1 pound of xylitol.

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Humans only absorb a certain percentage of xylitol. The human body doesn't even notice it. However, in dogs, xylitol triggers significant insulin release, which drops the blood sugar. It is definitely a species difference. People aren't in danger from sugar-free gum containing xylitol; dogs are.

The number of xylitol-related pet exposures is on the rise. Partly because of increased awareness, but more so because xylitol is being used in more products. Anything that is sugar-free could potentially have substituted xylitol for the original sweetener.

The extent of xylitol's potential effects on the liver are new—and certainly not good news—for dogs, their owners and veterinarians.

Some sugar-free chewing gums, are as much as 70 percent xylitol, depending on the brand and whether the product is used as a primary sweetener.

A 22-pound dog that consumes 1 gram of xylitol should be treated. This can equate to 3 to 4 pieces of some gum products.

There is no information on whether severe xylitol poisoning has occurred in cats.

Liver failure is one of our main concerns when dogs get into this. The low blood sugar we can deal with. But the liver damage, even with aggressive treatment, can make it difficult to save these animals.