

## Home Hazards

What you don't know can hurt them.

By Sophia Yin, DVM

COMPARED TO CATS, DOGS ARE NOT usually very picky about what they eat. So, if you drop that carrot or cracker on the floor and are too lazy to pick it up, one motion to your dog and the task is taken care of. The downside to this lack of discrimination is that dogs frequently fall victim to toxic ingestion.

Most people who live with dogs are aware of the common toxins. For instance, they know that chocolate—usually stolen by the dog from a Halloween stash or from under the Christmas tree—can cause restlessness, cardiac arrhythmias, seizures and even death. Many people also understand that feeding moldy leftovers isn't healthy, since some molds make toxins that are particularly dangerous for dogs.

Recently, however, a few new items have been added to the canine toxic-ingestion chart. Included on this list are seemingly innocuous grapes and/or raisins, products containing xylitol, and even paintballs.

Says Dr. Sharon Gwaltney-Brant, a board-certified veterinary toxicologist and medical director of the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, "With grape and raisin toxicosis, pets usually look normal for a few hours, but most start throwing up within 12 hours. Once they're at this



stage [showing signs of illness], longer hospitalization is usually required, because the dogs are prone to develop renal failure." In some cases, even a small amount can cause a problem. Says Gwaltney-Brant, "We had a 52-pound dog that had eaten just one [1.5 ounce] snack box of raisins. He got aggressive treatment after he started showing signs, but he still died." The cause of this particular toxicosis is a mystery thus far.

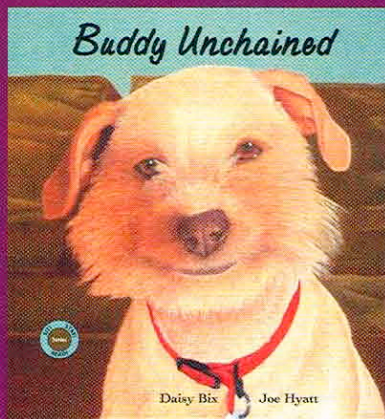
The fourth most common toxic-related item reported to the ASPCA is sugar-free, xylitol-containing gum (including Xylitewh Xlear and Spry Sugar-Free Gum). In dogs, the xylitol is absorbed into the bloodstream, where it stimulates the pancreas to secrete insulin. This in turn can cause hypoglycemia, a dangerous drop in blood sugar; weakness, sudden-onset seizures and death may follow. A sufficiently large dose can lead to liver failure, although the mechanism for this is unclear. Signs can appear as soon as 15 to 30 minutes after ingestion, but dogs can make a good recovery if treated immediately, before seizures become severe.

As if getting into a box of gum isn't bad enough, dogs' curiosity can lead them to eat things that we humans would never put in our mouths, such as paintballs—

marble-sized pellets containing polyethylene glycol. We (humans) use polyethylene glycol as a cathartic. When dogs eat paintballs—and they usually eat quite a few if given the opportunity—they're ingesting a large dose of this substance, which causes an excessive amount of fluid to be drawn into the gut. This, in turn, results in dehydration and dangerously high concentrations of sodium, both of which affect the brain. Dogs who have eaten paintballs may look drunk, be disoriented and shortly thereafter, develop seizures.

All of these new hazards may seem overwhelming, but the bottom line is to know what's safe for your dog and what's not, and keep all potentially toxic items out of reach. If you are unsure whether your dog has eaten something toxic, or eaten enough to cause damage, *do not wait*—once signs of illness appear, the dog's condition is severe and it may be too late. Keep the phone numbers of your vet and the ASPCA's poison control hotline nearby, and don't hesitate to use them. The life you save may be your dog's. 🐾

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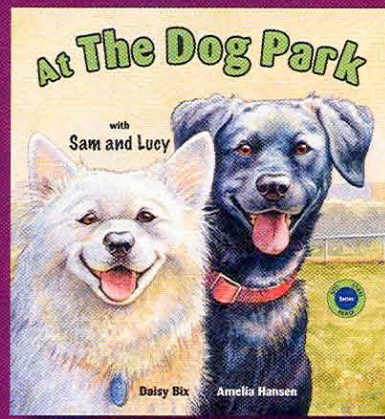
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