

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Veterinary Public Health & Rabies Control Unsafe Foods for Your Pet

Did you know that some foods people eat are harmful to pets? A common way that your pet gets sick is by being fed food off of the dinner table. Below are the foods that may sicken your pet and the symptoms to look for.

### Chocolate, Coffee, Caffeine

These products all contain substances called methylxanthines, which are found in cacao seeds. When eaten by pets, methylxanthines can cause vomiting and diarrhea, panting, excessive thirst and urination, hyperactivity, abnormal heart rhythm, tremors, seizures and even death. Darker chocolate is more dangerous than milk chocolate. For example, white chocolate has the lowest level of methylxanthines, while baking chocolate contains the highest.

### Alcohol

Beverages containing alcohol can cause vomiting, diarrhea, decreased coordination, central nervous system depression, difficulty breathing, tremors, abnormal blood acidity, coma and even death.

### Avocado

The leaves, fruit, seeds and bark of avocado trees contain Persin, which can cause vomiting and diarrhea in dogs. Birds and rodents are especially sensitive to avocado poisoning. They can develop difficulty breathing and fluid accumulation around the heart. Some ingestions may even be fatal. Avocado pits can block the intestines of dogs, requiring surgery to remove them.

### Macadamia Nuts

Macadamia nuts are commonly used in many cookies and candies. However, they can cause problems for your canine companion. These nuts cause weakness – especially in the hind legs, depression, vomiting, tremors and hyperthermia in dogs. Symptoms usually appear within 12 hours of ingestion and last approximately 12 to 48 hours.

### Grapes & Raisins

Although the toxic substance within grapes and raisins is unknown, these fruits can cause kidney failure. In pets who already have certain health problems, symptoms may be more severe.

### Yeast Dough

Uncooked yeast dough can rise and expand in your pet's digestive system. This can be painful and can cause the stomach or intestines to stretch too much. Ingested uncooked yeast dough also produces ethanol that causes ethanol toxicity in your pet. See alcohol for symptoms of ethanol toxicity.

### Raw/Undercooked Meat, Eggs and Bones

Otherwise known as the BARF diet (Bones and Raw Food), raw meat and raw eggs can contain bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* that can be harmful to pets and can contaminate human hands. In addition, raw eggs contain an enzyme called avidin that decreases the absorption of biotin (a B vitamin), which can lead to skin and coat problems. Another problem associated with eating raw meat is *Toxoplasmosis*.<sup>3</sup> It is most dangerous in cats because they produce the oocysts (eggs) that can then infect humans and other animals. *Toxoplasmosis* is especially harmful to pregnant women and can cause a fetus to become very ill. Cats do not usually show symptoms but when they do, they demonstrate fever, eye inflammation, loss of appetite, lethargy, abdominal discomfort and neurologic abnormalities. Diagnosis is dependent on history, symptoms and blood tests. Feeding your pet raw and/or cooked bones may seem like a natural and healthy option that might occur if your pet lived in the wild. However, this can be very dangerous for a domestic pet, who might choke on bones, or sustain a grave injury should the bone splinter and become lodged in or puncture your pet's digestive tract.

### Xylitol

Xylitol is used as a sweetener in many products, including gum, candy, baked goods and toothpaste. It can cause insulin release in most species, which can lead to liver failure. The increase in insulin leads to lowered sugar levels. Initial signs of toxicosis include vomiting, lethargy and loss of coordination. Signs can progress to collapse and seizures. Liver problems can be detected by blood tests within a few days.

## Onions, Garlic, Chives

These vegetables and herbs can cause gastrointestinal irritation and can lead to red blood cell damage. Although cats are more susceptible, dogs are also at risk if a large enough amount is consumed. Toxicity is normally diagnosed through reviewing the history, symptoms and blood tests.

## Milk

Because pets do not possess significant amounts of lactase (the enzyme that breaks down lactose in milk), milk and other milk-based products may cause them diarrhea or other digestive upset.

## Salt

Large amounts of salt can produce excessive thirst and urination, or even salt poisoning in pets. Signs that your pet may have eaten too many salty foods include vomiting, diarrhea, depression, tremors, elevated body temperature, seizures and even death. In other words, keep those salty chips to yourself!

## Moldy Foods

Moldy foods produce mycotoxins which, when ingested by pets, can cause severe illness and even death. Symptoms are vomiting, depression, excessive thirst, and excessive urination. If your pet exhibits any of these symptoms, take it to a veterinarian right away because mycotoxins can cause death in as little as three days.

## Fatty Foods

Ingested fatty foods can cause pancreatitis in pets. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, no appetite, abdominal pain, dehydration, severe weakness and/or collapse, shock, and fever.

## Corn Cobs

Corn cobs can block your pet's intestines requiring surgery to remove them. The most common symptom of intestinal blockage is vomiting. Intestinal blockage can be fatal so it is important to take your pet to the veterinarian right away if you suspect your pet has ingested corn cobs.



## References

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