

'People foods' that can kill your pet

From chocolate to raisins, here's what not to feed Fido — even if he begs

It feels good to treat your pet to human food every once in a while. Those puppy-dog eyes are hard to resist as they watch you eat and try to convince you that they are starving! It makes you want to give them a taste of everything you eat. But beware: Giving in to those eyes and giving dogs human foods can actually harm them.

In 2007, the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center received more than 130,000 calls. Most cases of animal poisoning were caused by common human foods and household items.

Many foods we enjoy can be dangerous to animals. It's best to stick to pet food and a diet recommended by your vet. Here are a few of the most toxic foods that can harm your pet:

Bad news foods

Avocados

They contain a toxic component called persin, which can damage heart, lung and other tissue in many animals. This fruit is very toxic to dogs, cats and most animals.

Beer

Alcoholic beverages can cause the same damage to an animal's liver and brain as they cause in humans. But the effects can be deadly on animals since they are much smaller than us. The smaller the animal, the more deadly the effects can be. Even a small amount of alcohol may cause vomiting and damage the liver and brain.

Nuts

Walnuts and macadamia nuts are especially toxic. Effects can be anything from vomiting to paralysis to death. Within 12 hours of eating the nuts, pets start to develop symptoms such as an inability to stand or walk, vomiting, hyperthermia (elevated body temperature), weakness, and an elevated heart rate. These symptoms can be even worse if your dog eats some chocolate with the nuts. The effect can cause kidney failure, often leading to death.

Chocolate

Chocolate contains theobromine, which can kill your pet if eaten in large quantities. Dark and unsweetened baking chocolates are especially dangerous. Giving your pup a piece of chocolate cake or even letting him lick the chocolate icing on the cake could cause him to become ill. Theobromine can also cause a dog or cat's heart to beat very rapidly or irregularly, which could result in death if the pet is exercising or overly active.

Candy

Candy or anything containing Xylitol (a common sweetener found in some diet products) can cause a sudden drop in an animal's blood sugar, loss of coordination and seizures. If left untreated, the animal could die.

Caffeine

Coffee, tea or any product that contains caffeine stimulates an animal's central nervous and cardiac systems. This can lead to restlessness, heart palpitations and death, depending on how much the animal consumes.

Grapes and raisins

Grapes and raisins can lead to kidney failure in dogs. As little as a single serving of raisins can kill them. And the effects are cumulative, which means that even if a dog eats just one or two grapes or raisins regularly, the toxin that builds in his system will eventually kill him.

Onions

Onions are another common food that can be highly toxic to pets. They can destroy an animal's red blood cells and lead to anemia, weakness and breathing difficulties. Their effects are also cumulative over time.

Medicine

Hide medicine from your pets just like you would from your children. The most common cause of pet poisoning is from animals ingesting a medicine or drug normally prescribed for humans.

And this is not just because furry pals are getting into their pet parent's medicine cabinets. In many cases, pet owners give their feline and canine friends an over-the-counter medication to ease an animal's pain. But acetaminophen and ibuprofen, the active ingredients in many common pain relievers, are extremely toxic to dogs and cats. They can cause gastric ulcers, liver damage, kidney failure and sometimes death.

Good news foods

There are a few things that you CAN give to your furry pal. However, you should always consult a veterinarian before introducing a new food item to your pet.

Although these foods are normally harmless, some animals have sensitive gastrointestinal tracts. So even these healthy treats should be avoided if they cause gastrointestinal upset for your pet. Keep in mind that these and other "extras" should not make up more than 5 to 10 percent of the pet's daily caloric intake.

Lean meats

Any cooked lean meat should be fine for most dogs. High-fat meats, chicken skin and fat from steaks or roasts are not recommended. Ingestion may lead to gastrointestinal upset or even pancreatitis. This can be a very painful condition for dogs. In addition, most companion animals do not need extra fat in their diets. Never give your pet meat with the bone in it. Animals can choke on the bones, and they can splinter as well.

Vegetables

Carrot sticks, green beans, cucumber slices and zucchini slices are all OK.

Fruit

Apple slices, orange slices, bananas and watermelon are all OK. Make sure the seeds have been taken out; seeds are not good for your pet!

Baked potatoes

Plain baked potatoes are fine, but make sure they are cooked — no unripe potatoes or potato plants.

Bread

Plain cooked bread is fine; just make sure there are no nuts or raisins added.

Rice and pasta

Plain, cooked pasta and white rice are OK. Often veterinarians recommend plain rice with some boiled chicken when gastrointestinal upset is present.

In case of emergency

Despite all the precautions you take to keep your pet pals safe, accidents do happen. That's why the ASPCA, Humane Society and animal advocates advise pet owners to keep the telephone numbers of their local veterinarian and the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center — (888) 426-4435 — in a prominent location.

Common signs of poisoning include muscle tremors or seizures; vomiting and diarrhea; drooling; redness of skin, ears and eyes; and swelling and bleeding.

If you suspect your pet has consumed, inhaled or come in contact with a toxic substance, stay calm and call for help immediately. If you see your pet consuming anything you think might be toxic, seek emergency help immediately even if she or he is not exhibiting any symptoms.