

Sugar-free candy not a sweet treat for dogs, veterinarian warns

October 31 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

When taking home a stash of candy, keep an eye on the sugar-free kind. While it may be a good alternative for humans, just a small amount can be life-threatening for pets, says a Kansas State University veterinarian.

Artificial sweetener xylitol, an alcohol sugar, is in many products, including sugar-free candy and [gum](#). With two-thirds fewer calories than sugar, xylitol causes little inference with insulin release in people, making it a popular sugar substitute for diabetics. However, just one stick of sugar-free gum could be toxic to your dog.

"Unfortunately for [dogs](#), when they consume xylitol, it does release insulin and causes [low blood sugar](#)," said Susan Nelson, Kansas State University clinical associate professor of clinical sciences and veterinarian at the Veterinary Health Center. "There also are cases where enough was ingested that it caused liver failure. This can cause clotting disorders and seizures in dogs, with a poor prognosis for recovery.

Along with sugar-free candy and gum, xylitol can be found in nicotine gums, baked goods, breath mints, antacids, multivitamins, nasal sprays, pain medication, sleep aids, antianxiety medication, toothpaste and mouthwash. Typically, the higher xylitol is listed on the ingredient list, the more there is in the product. But it is not always listed on the ingredient list because some products may contain proprietary blends, Nelson says.

"On average, one stick of sugar-free gum can cause toxicity in dogs

weighing around 10 pounds," Nelson said. "That's all it takes, and it's more likely to happen than you think. You may have a package of gum in your purse or your pocket. A lot of times dogs go rummaging through those and find the products and consume them."

Because xylitol can be quickly absorbed in a dog's bloodstream, it can reach peak levels in the animal's body within 30 minutes and symptoms of toxicity can develop rapidly. It's important to contact your veterinarian immediately if you believe your dog has consumed anything with an [artificial sweetener](#). Although there is no antidote available, dogs that are treated early have a better chance of recovery.

Nelson says the Veterinary Health Center frequently sees cases of xylitol poisoning.

"It's very common, and the more popular and commonly used this product becomes, the cases of xylitol poisonings in dogs will increase," she said. "The bottom line is that any products that have artificial sweeteners in them or medications that contain [xylitol](#) need to be kept away from your pets."

Provided by Kansas State University

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