

The Dangers of Xylitol Ingestion in Dogs

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It seems innocent enough, but ingestion of even a couple pieces of sugarless gum by a dog can lead to a potentially life threatening situation. Take a look at your pack of sugarless gum or mints and you will likely see the ingredient xylitol. Xylitol is a sugar alcohol that is used as a sweetener in many products such as sugar-free gum, mints, and baked goods. Its use as a sugar substitute has grown rapidly over the past few years as it is safe in people.

Unfortunately, dogs are very sensitive to its effects and can quickly develop life threatening liver disease or low blood sugar levels with a relatively small dose. Once ingested, xylitol is rapidly absorbed and the side effects can be seen very quickly. Therefore, it is extremely important to let your veterinarian know and bring in your pet as soon as possible if your dog ingests something containing xylitol.

Vomiting is usually the initial sign. Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) often develops within 30-60 minutes of ingestion, though it can be delayed for up to 12 hours. Typical signs you may notice as the blood sugar drops are lethargy and weakness which can progress to seizures or other neurological signs. We can typically treat the low blood sugar effectively with intravenous fluids and dextrose supplementation as long as we start quickly enough.

Recently, there have been increasing reports of liver enzyme elevations as well as clotting disorders (coagulopathies). Increased liver enzymes are usually noted within 12 to 24 hours, but can take as long as 72 hours. This damage to the liver can be much more severe and will typically need more aggressive monitoring and treatment.

Unfortunately, many people do not recognize the dangers of xylitol ingestion. Even though it is safe for people, the effects to your dog from getting into your purse and eating a pack of gum can be severe. With prompt treatment for the low blood sugar, the prognosis is good, and mild liver enzyme elevations typically resolve over a few days with appropriate treatment. However, with severe liver enzyme elevations and coagulopathies, the prognosis is guarded to poor, which is why prompt treatment is essential. Remember to keep your gum, mints, and any other items that contain xylitol out of reach of your pets, and if they should get into it please let us know right away.



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