



# Xylitol and dogs

## DON'T MIX

The sugar substitute xylitol is in chewing gum, breath mints, toothpaste and many other products. Check labels and keep items with xylitol out of your pet's reach. If you suspect your pet has eaten xylitol, call your veterinarian or a poison call center right away.

**Y**our 6-month-old puppy, Hoover, will eat anything that isn't tied down. Like many dog owners, you know chocolate can be dangerous to your pooch. But you may not know that if Hoover sticks his nose in your handbag and

eats a pack of sugarless chewing gum, the consequences could be deadly.

Sugarless gum may contain xylitol, a class of sweetener known as sugar alcohol. Xylitol is present in many products and foods for human use but can have devastating effects on your pet.

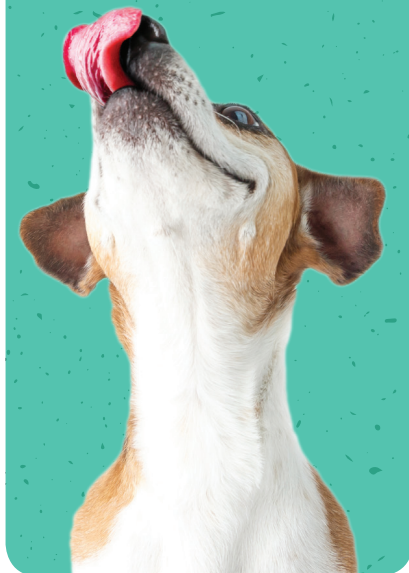
### Other foods with xylitol

Sugar-free chewing gum isn't the only product containing xylitol. Slightly lower in calories than sugar, this sugar substitute is also used to sweeten sugar-free candy, such as mints and chocolate bars. Other products that may contain xylitol include:

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**START HERE!**

If you think your dog may have eaten a product containing xylitol, call your veterinarian, an emergency clinic or an animal poison control center right away.



- > Breath mints
- > Baked goods
- > Children's and adult chewable vitamins
- > Cough syrup
- > Dietary supplements
- > Mouthwash
- > Over-the-counter medicines
- > Peanut and nut butters
- > Sugar-free desserts, including "skinny" ice cream
- > Toothpaste.

Xylitol can be used in baked goods, too, such as cakes, muffins and pies—often because the baker is substituting another sweetener for sugar, as in products for people with diabetes. People can buy xylitol in bulk to bake sweet treats at home, and many in-store bakeries

sell baked goods containing the sweetener. Some pediatric dentists also recommend xylitol-containing chewing gum for children, and these products could end up in a dog's mouth by accident. It's a good idea to keep all such products well out of your dog's reach.

### Why is xylitol dangerous to dogs, but not people?

In both people and dogs, the body's blood sugar level is controlled by the release of insulin from the pancreas. In people, xylitol doesn't stimulate the release of insulin by the pancreas. But when dogs eat something containing xylitol, the xylitol is absorbed more quickly into the bloodstream and may result in a potent release of insulin by the pancreas.

This may result in a rapid and profound decrease in the level of blood sugar (hypoglycemia), an effect that can occur within just 10 to 60 minutes of eating the xylitol. Untreated, this hypoglycemia can quickly become life-threatening, according to FDA veterinarian Martine Hartogensis, DVM.



### Signs to watch for in dogs

Xylitol poisoning in dogs may lead to vomiting, followed by signs associated with the sudden lowering of your dog's blood sugar, such as decreased activity, weakness, staggering, incoordination, collapse and seizures.

If you think your dog has eaten xylitol, take him to your veterinarian or an emergency animal hospital immediately, Dr. Hartogensis advises. Because hypoglycemia and other serious adverse effects may not occur in some cases for up to 12 to 24 hours, your dog may need to be hospitalized for medical monitoring.

### What you can do to avoid xylitol poisoning in your dog

- > **Check ingredient labels, especially on sugar-free items, for xylitol.** If a product contains xylitol, make sure your pet can't get to it. Keep those products well out of your dog's reach. Remember, some dogs are adept at counter surfing.
- > **Only use pet toothpaste for pets, never human toothpaste.**
- > **Watch nut butters.** If you give your dog nut butter as a treat or to encourage him to take pills, check the label first to make sure it doesn't contain xylitol.

### CATS AND FERRETS

Xylitol doesn't seem to be as dangerous for cats and other pets. Cats appear to be spared, at least in part, by their disdain for sweets. Ferret owners, however, should be careful, as ferrets have been known to develop low blood sugar and seizures, like dogs, after eating products containing xylitol.