

Feeding Management

# Toxic Foods for Dogs and Cats

A basic principle of toxicology says “the dose makes the poison.” This adage applies to many common food items, which may contain natural chemicals that can be toxic when consumed in sufficient quantities. The potentially harmful amount may differ among species, so what may be safe for people to eat may be dangerous for pets. When some dogs — and an occasional cat — get access to certain foods (e.g., chocolate candy, baked goods, moldy foods in the garbage), they might eat an amount that provides a dangerous dose of the potentially toxic substance or overwhelms their bodies’ ability to process it.



## Key Messages

- Some foods, while safe for people to eat, may cause a wide range of health issues for dogs and cats. While veterinary toxicologists know why some foods cause poisoning in pets (e.g., theobromine and caffeine in chocolate), they have yet to identify the toxic agent in others (e.g., grapes, raisins and macadamia nuts).
- Dogs are far more likely to experience food-related toxicities than cats due to their scavenging nature and tendency to investigate the environment with their mouths.
- The list below is not exhaustive; however, it includes those foods most commonly reported to animal poison control centers.

Food	Potential Health Problems
Chocolate	Vomiting, diarrhea, increased heart rate, high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythm, tremors, seizures
Xylitol (natural sweetener found in certain sugar-free gums, candies, baked goods, toothpastes)	Low blood sugar (glucose), liver failure
Coffee, tea and other caffeinated drinks	Hyperactivity, restlessness, vomiting, fast heart rate, rapid breathing, tremors, abnormal heart rhythm

Food	Potential Health Problems
Raw or cooked onions, garlic, leeks, chives ( <i>Allium</i> spp.)*	Lower-than-normal number of red blood cells due to cell damage and breakdown, digestive upset, increased heart rate, increased breathing rate
Grapes, raisins, Zante currants ( <i>Vitis</i> spp.)	Digestive upset, loss of appetite for food, sudden kidney failure
Macadamia nuts	Hind limb weakness, vomiting, poor balance or coordination, tremors, increased body temperature, joint stiffness
Alcohol (ethanol)	Depression or lethargy, incoordination, vomiting, decreased breathing rate, low blood sugar, low blood pressure, low body temperature
Raw yeast-containing dough	Lethargy, incoordination, vomiting, decreased breathing rate, low blood sugar, low blood pressure, low body temperature, bloating with possible stomach twisting, seizures, respiratory failure
Moldy foods (some molds produce toxins known as mycotoxins)	Vomiting, agitation, incoordination, tremors, seizures, elevated body temperature

\*Small amounts of these vegetables, including powder and oil forms, are safely added to some pet foods for flavor

- To avoid an emergency trip to the veterinary hospital, pet owners should identify potential hazards in their home and store them well out of reach of curious cats and dogs.
- If ingestion of a potentially toxic substance is suspected, a veterinarian or animal poison control center should be contacted immediately. Availability of animal-specific poison control services varies from country to country. Check within your region for a resource before one is needed.

Assistance for Veterinary Professionals and Pet Owners	
United States and Canada	ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center Phone: (888) 426-4435 Website: <a href="http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control">www.aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control</a>
United States, Canada and the Caribbean	Pet Poison Helpline Phone: (855) 764-7661 Website: <a href="http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com">www.petpoisonhelpline.com</a>
United Kingdom	Animal PoisonLine

<b>Assistance for Veterinary Professionals and Pet Owners</b>	
	Phone: 01202 509000 Website: <a href="http://www.animalpoisonline.co.uk">www.animalpoisonline.co.uk</a>
Australia New Zealand	Australian Animal Poisons Helpline Australia Phone: 1300 869 738 New Zealand Phone: 0800 869 738 Website: <a href="https://animalpoisons.com.au">https://animalpoisons.com.au</a>

<b>Assistance provided to veterinary professionals only</b>	
Australia New Zealand	Pet Poison Helpline World Australia Phone: 0011 800 4444 0002 New Zealand Phone: 00 800 4444 0002 Website: <a href="http://www.petpoisonhelpline.com">www.petpoisonhelpline.com</a>

## Additional Resources

Aldrich, G. (2006). Onions and garlic offer flavor in the right amounts. *Petfood Industry*, 48(11), 40–41.

Cortinovis, C., & Caloni, F. (2016). Household food items toxic to dogs and cats. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 3, Article 26. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2016.00026

Kovalkovičová, N., Sutiaková, I., Pistl, J., & Sutiak, V. (2009). Some food toxic for pets. *Interdisciplinary Toxicology*, 2(3), 169–176. doi: 10.2478/v10102-009-0012-4

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.