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## No sweets for our sweet dogs for Valentine's Day

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problem.

In the event of a suspected ingestion, it is important for your veterinarian to know what type of chocolate and how much might have been ingested. It's safest to assume the maximum amount consumed, in order to determine if this might be a problem. In most cases of moderate ingestion, the recommendation will be to get the dog to your vet in order to induce vomiting and remove any chocolate not yet absorbed, and then to administer an activated charcoal to absorb any ingredient left over. Other recommendations might include hospitalization, monitoring for progression of symptoms, and intravenous fluids and other supportive medications.

Xylitol is a sugar substitute found in a variety of products such as sugarless gum, toothpaste and peanut butter. It has some interesting beneficial properties in humans - it is antibacterial and may help with osteoporosis. However, in dogs, it is potentially fatal. It causes a huge response of insulin release from the pancreas, resulting in sudden life-threatening levels of low blood sugar, as well as a delayed liver tissue destruction. The mechanism for liver destruction is not known, but it occurs eight to 12 hours after ingestion, so ongoing monitoring and care is very important in patients.

It takes only a small amount of xylitol for toxicity to develop - it is possible for one small piece of Orbit chewing gum to cause severe low blood sugar in a 10 pound dog. Unlike chocolate toxicity, in which a few minutes on the phone can be spent figuring out how much and what type was ingested, and how big the dog is, xylitol ingestion is always an emergency until proven otherwise. If you suspect or know that your dog ate xylitol, it's best to call your veterinarian (or local veterinary emergency center) and bring your dog in right away. In some cases, your vet will induce vomiting if ingestion has occurred within the past one to two hours. Further treatment is almost always recommended for this problem - hospitalization, intravenous fluids and monitoring bloodwork for the next one to two days. As with any suspect or known toxicity, bring the package that identifies the product and amount of xylitol contained in the product.

An informative website for these toxicities is [veterinary partner.com](http://veterinaryclinic.com/chocolate/calc.html). Here is the specific link to the Chocolate Toxicity Calculator: <http://veterinaryclinic.com/chocolate/calc.html>

It's the sweet time of year, with Valentine's Day as the reminder to love and be loved, and to present sweet gifts upon those we cherish. With Americans spending record amounts on the care of their beloved dogs, cats and other pets, it's fair to say that some of those lucky animals will receive a special Valentine's treat. It's also fair to say that some of those pets might find their way into a supply of candy, cookies and other treats meant for someone else. I'd like to review two of the most common "sweets" toxicities in dogs that I handle in general practice: chocolate and xylitol.

Almost everyone knows that chocolate can be a problem for dogs. Chocolate contains methylxanthines called theobromine and caffeine - these are the same stimulation compounds found in tea and coffee. At low doses, these can cause stomach upset or agitation. With moderate amounts ingested, signs can progress to increased heart rate, urination and muscle tremors. Larger amounts ingested result in irregular heart rates, difficulty breathing, seizures, high body temperature and potentially death. Symptoms develop within four to six hours, and can last for a few days, depending on the severity.

Chocolate toxicity is directly related to the weight of the dog, the amount of chocolate consumed (in ounces or grams), and the type of chocolate. The more pure and dark the chocolate, the higher the level of toxicity. For example, the worst combination is a small dog eating large amounts of cocoa powder or dark bittersweet baking chocolate. Conversely, a tiny amount of white or milk chocolate in a large dog will rarely result in a

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