

Is Peanut Butter Dangerous for Dogs? Regina R. Allen DVM

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Peanut butter, given either as-is or in dog treats, has been a staple of dog rewards forever. And in its regular form, it is safe to be enjoyed by dogs of all sizes and breeds. However, several specialty peanut and nut butter brands such as Nuts 'n More, Krush Nutrition, and P-28 Foods all make peanut butter and nut-based spreads containing the sugar alcohol sweetener Xylitol.

Xylitol, while safe for humans, is dangerous for dogs, causing hypoglycemia and liver necrosis, depending on the amount consumed. The concerns are two-fold: dogs fed these specialty peanut butter or nut-based spreads as a straight treat, or dogs consuming treats made with these products. So far, mainstream peanut butter brands haven't started using Xylitol – only the three specialty brands include it in their formulations. However, it is important that owners check labels to make sure Xylitol isn't present. Something else to check is whether the packaging says "sweetened naturally" or that it uses a "natural sweetener." Since Xylitol isn't an artificial sweetener (it's a sugar alcohol, which is found normally in small amounts in certain fruits and vegetables), the product label may say instead "sugar alcohol," "sugar-free," or "no sugar added." When in doubt, do not feed these products to dogs.

Other products that contain Xylitol include: Chewing gum, breath mints, toothpaste, antacids, Children's Allegra Oral Suspension, stool softeners, chewable vitamins, nasal sprays, Clemmy's Rich and Creamy ice cream products, Dr. John's products (hard and soft candies, chocolates, drink mixes, etc.), Jell-O sugar-free pudding snacks, Nature's Hollow products (jams, syrup, ketchup, honey, etc.), SparX Candy, Zipfizz energy drink-mix powders, and an assortment of prescription medications.

If a dog is known to have consumed a Xylitol-containing product, immediately induce vomiting by giving two tablespoons of hydrogen peroxide orally. If vomiting does not occur within ten minutes, give two more tablespoons. This will cause the majority of dogs to vomit. If the dog still does not vomit or vomits only foam/mucous due to an empty stomach, immediate veterinary intervention is warranted. Treatment consists of intravenous dextrose until the dog can self-regulate its blood glucose concentrations (typically 12 to 48 hours). Additionally, liver enzymes should be monitored starting one to two days after exposure, since that is when liver damage becomes apparent. Should liver necrosis develop, IV fluids, dextrose, hepatoprotectants, and monitoring of coagulation profiles are needed.

The prognosis following Xylitol exposure is excellent when the ingestion is caught early, evacuation of the stomach is performed, and blood glucose is monitored frequently. The prognosis becomes guarded if the dog has already begun to develop liver failure.

References:

DVM360.com News Center: Xylitol now found in certain peanut and nut butters by Katie James, July 15, 2015.

DVM360.com News Center: Veterinarians and clients should know the surprising places xylitol is found by Ahna Brutlag, DVM, MS, DABT, DABVT, February 01, 2014.