



Xylitol: Potential Danger to Your Pooch

Xylitol is a naturally occurring substance that is widely used as a sugar substitute. It is primarily extracted from corn fiber or birch trees, which is why xylitol is also known as “birch sugar.” Although it has been used as a sugar substitute for decades, its popularity has recently increased due to being less caloric than sugar; and with respect to oral health, xylitol helps stimulate saliva, and reduces the formation of plaque and cavities. Because of its versatile uses, this ingredient can be found in multiple foods and household items. Some common products:

- Sugar free foods - gum, candy, baked goods, peanut butter, ice cream
- Breath mints
- Toothpaste + mouthwash
- Over the counter medications - cough syrup, nasal sprays, chewable vitamins

Xylitol is safe for humans, but has serious side effects on dogs. When a dog ingests xylitol, it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and this stimulates the pancreas to release insulin. The release of insulin results in a decrease in the dog’s blood sugar (hypoglycemia), which can be life threatening if untreated. Symptoms usually appear 30 to 60 minutes after ingestion, but can take up to 12 hours. Dogs may experience any of the following symptoms:

- Vomiting
- Weakness, sluggishness, lethargy
- Lack of coordination or difficulty standing
- Tremors
- Seizures
- Sudden collapse

****In the event that a dog starts displaying symptoms, bring them to a veterinarian as soon as possible.****

Severe xylitol poisoning has been shown to cause liver damage. Signs of liver injury may include a decrease in appetite, lethargy, yellowing of the skin as well as vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms indicating liver injury in your dog may not be seen for two or three days after ingestion.

If your dog has just eaten xylitol but has not yet developed any clinical signs, your veterinarian may induce vomiting to prevent further absorption depending on what your dog's blood glucose level is. If clinical signs have developed, treatment will be based on the signs that are being shown. Since xylitol can cause both low blood glucose and low potassium levels, your veterinarian will perform blood work to determine whether these problems need to be treated. In all cases, your dog will require hospitalization for blood glucose monitoring, dextrose administration, intravenous fluids, liver protectants, and any other supportive care that may be needed. Blood work should be monitored frequently to make sure that blood glucose and liver function remain normal.

Not every product contains a toxic dose of xylitol. Toxic doses are based on the size of the dog and the amount of xylitol ingested. Due to the varying amounts of xylitol in products, it is recommended to call Animal Poison Control Center (APCC) 888-426-4435 or Pet Poison Helpline 855-764-7661 in the event that your dog ingests this ingredient; both lines are available 24/7. You will be able to speak with a veterinary toxicology specialist and they will be able to provide advice based on your specific situation.

***Consultations with Animal Poison Control are approximately \$100 but if your pet has a HomeAgain microchip and is enrolled in the full-service registration program, poison control consultations are free. Call 1-888-HomeAgain and select the option for “medical emergency.”*

***Consultations with Pet Poison Helpline are \$85*