

ACCES for Pet Health

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What do You Do if your pet eats something Toxic?

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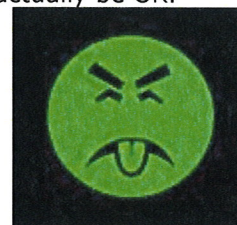


You've come home from work and walk in the door. Suddenly it occurs to you that your dog has not come to the door to greet you as usual. Even after you have called for her, she hasn't come around. With growing concern you begin walking around the house looking for her-first the living room, then the bedroom, then the den. To no avail you walk right into the kitchen and there you see it: the disaster scene.

Little pieces of wrapper are lying all over the floor. The silver packaging reflects the overhead light as you look at your dog and ask, "What happened?" Your dog is lying on the floor, peering up at you with a sad look in her eyes and candy remains on her lips.

Many of us have been there-but do you really know what to do when it happens? Last week we outlined some of the medical problems that can occur due to ingestion of grapes, chocolate, onions, and xylitol. For more information on this topic, visit [last week's blog](#) posting. This week, we want to outline the tools that you need in the event that your pet does ingest something toxic.

Whether your dog or cat has eaten chocolate, raw bread dough, medications (human or animal), a potential poison such as rat bait or fertilizer, grapes, a tennis ball or other foreign object, an entire dog bone, or something else potentially hazardous, the first thing to you should do is **NOT PANIC**. In most cases it takes some time for these items to have harmful effects. In others, things that seem toxic may actually be OK. However, it is important to know that you don't really know exactly when your pet ate the potentially harmful item, and there is a sense of urgency no matter when the animal ingested the object. So, you should call your veterinarian right away, or go to the nearest emergency clinic.



Before you do make the call or walk out the door, you need to gather as much information as possible. Establish a time frame of when the pet ate the toxin. Also try to determine how much was consumed. Be able to tell the person on the phone how old your pet is, its weight, and any medication the pet is currently taking.



Then, gather the packaging of the item-the pill vial, the candy wrapper, the baking instructions, the package of poison and **BRING IT WITH YOU**. This information can be the most important thing you can provide your doctor because it allows the doctor to start the appropriate treatment right away. It also tells him or her whether the induction of vomiting will be safe-some items that are corrosive (such as acids from batteries) can be more harmful when vomiting is induced than when the object passes through the intestinal tract. Some items are too large or lodged too solidly to vomit and must be surgically removed.

Next, head to your veterinarian or emergency clinic right away. **DO NOT** try to induce vomiting yourself with items like hydrogen peroxide or syrup of ipicac. Syrup of ipicac is harmful because it can cause cardiac arrest or other damage to the heart. If your veterinarian wants you to induce vomiting at home, s/he will be able to give you the appropriate instructions.

At the hospital, your veterinarian has a series of special medications that are injected intravenously, intramuscularly, or orally. These drugs will make the pet vomit within minutes and are tailored to your pet's specific weight. The veterinarian can also reverse the effects of the drugs by giving another safe, intramuscular injection. The doctor may follow-up vomiting by feeding your pet activated charcoal to help neutralize any toxins that may have entered the blood stream.



Sometimes, depending on the toxin, your pet will then need to be hospitalized for at least 24 hours and given IV fluids to flush the system.

It is important to be completely honest with your veterinarian. Many times owners are hesitant to tell the doctor exactly what the pet ate because the item consumed is an illegal substance, such as marijuana, and they fear legal ramifications. It is important to remember that the veterinarian does not judge you on what you have in your home, and has only the pet's best interest at heart. Knowing what your pet ate is crucial for the veterinarian to treat your pet appropriately.

If your pet has swallowed a foreign object, it may have to be taken out surgically. There are also non-surgical procedures such as endoscopy which sometimes work if the object is in the stomach. Endoscopy allows the doctor to retrieve the item using a camera and scope with a hook on the end. The hook grabs the item, and then pulls it back out the way it went in. If the item is lodged too forcefully, then surgery may be the next option.

The most important thing to remember is to be aware of the things in your home that your pet could potentially get into. Last week's blog outlines some of the more toxic foods pets commonly ingest. Next week's blog topic will provide information about how to pet-proof your home, so stay tuned for more information!

For a list of toxic plants and other items to keep away from your pet, visit the [National Animal Poison Control](#) website. It is always a good idea to keep in mind some of the toxic agents commonly found around the home.

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at November 3, 2008 12:00 a.m.

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