

Ask A Vet: Chocolate and Dogs

Sunday, September 15, 2013

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I've heard that chocolate is bad for dogs, but is there any other food that we should be concerned about sharing with our dogs?

- Worried Dog Owner

Dear Reader,

Yes, it absolutely is true that chocolate can be toxic for dogs. If your dog consumes chocolate, baker's chocolate in particular, it is important to call your veterinarian right away. Chocolate can make dogs jittery and excited, have high heart rates, and can potentially lead to problems in the brain causing seizures. For sharing other items, there are certain foods to be aware of. First, the majority of table scraps (meats and fats) can cause pancreatitis in your dog. This can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, and possibly a lengthy and costly hospital stay. Along those same lines, meats containing bones can splinter and cause cuts within the stomach and intestines, leading to the need for emergency surgery. The most notorious bone-in meats are chicken/turkey bones and fish. If your dog eats one of these, do not try to induce vomiting at home, as the bones can become lodged in the esophagus.

Most fruits and vegetables are safe to give to dogs with several exceptions. Avocado in excess can cause vomiting and diarrhea. Raisins and grapes have the potential to cause kidney failure. There are some dogs that can eat a lot of raisins or grapes without problems, and others who become extremely sick with only a handful of either. Because of this, I recommend avoiding raisins and grapes altogether, due to the severe consequences. Onions and garlic can damage your dog's red blood cells leading to a severe blood loss. Any candy or gum using the artificial sweetener Xylitol can cause your dog's blood sugar to drop dramatically and can cause liver damage, coma, seizures and potentially death. It is important to note that over-feeding anything that your dog is not used to or changing foods too rapidly, can cause vomiting and diarrhea. It is best to find a good, quality dog food and to avoid feeding too many other items.

And while not a food, it is important to NEVER give your dog any medications that were not prescribed for him/her, or without consulting your veterinarian. For example, while trying to treat your dog's arthritis or sore paw, giving Tylenol or Ibuprofen can cause permanent kidney or liver damage. Please call before giving something that you

might think is questionable, and your veterinarian would be happy to discuss any of your questions regarding foods or medications.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman