

What's That in His Mouth?!!!!

Andre Hess MRCVS

It is always quite wondrous how unselective-about-what-they-eat our dogs are when out on a walk. Poo (of any kind), dead vermin, dead birds, dead and live rabbits, takeaways (and the containers) on the road, fallout from bird-feeders, grass freshly sprayed with herbicide! Down it goes. And then there is also cake, chocolates, Haribo's, plastic, eyeballs from toys, and so on and so on. And, oh, anything that falls from the table or from your handbag – and is it not uncanny how the fat one gets there first? This article, however, will focus on POISON! I am not going to provide a list of poisons, but simply offer an overview on the topic, and some reassurance.

Need we worry about poisons? On the whole, not!

Danger lurks largely in these categories:

- ≡ **Poisons:** This is a big topic, and the subject of a separate article. But true oral route poisonings that lead to death are now rare, and poisons for deliberate use are difficult to obtain or make. When in doubt, phone the vet. Remember, it is one of the rare professional services that is free of charge (try and speak to a solicitor or an accountant for free - just saying). The most common cases we see in practice are from rat-poison or slug-pellets, so look out for those.

- ≡ **Accidental dosing with 'poisons':** In my experience this is most often due to people giving their dogs their own medications in error, the dog stealing a packet of tablets from your handbag, or from tablets dropped onto the floor (mostly cold and flu medications). When in doubt about what you have done, phone the vet. Time is of the essence, and getting the dog to the vet in less than 20 – 30 minutes is crucial. We can still make them vomit at this point, which immediately solves the problem. If you cannot get to a vet, you could achieve this effect by dosing of a very concentrated salt solution (as much salt as you can dissolve in warm water). I would suggest 5 ml in a Norfolk Terrier (and stop

when the vomiting has been achieved!). In the period after that, we sometimes dose activated charcoal, which absorbs toxins and coats the gut lining.

- ≡ **Intolerances (and food allergies) and infections:** Though not a poisoning, it sometimes presents to the vet or owner as such (for example, sudden vomiting and diarrhoea with blood). The owner learns very quickly what their dog is sensitive to, and bad reactions are usually associated with inadvertent feeding with these foodstuffs. Parties, Christmas, Summer, and Easter are bad times for dogs with food intolerances and allergies.
- ≡ **Foreign Body obstructions and partial obstructions that initially looks like the dog has been poisoned:** This is category that produces the most problems, and is the best reason for training your dog to 'leave it!' or 'drop it!' from the minute they arrive at your house. If your dog vomits more than a handful of times, independent of feeding times, and just looks ill (you know your dog!), go and see the vet.
- ≡ **Foods that are not poisonous to us, but are poisonous to the dog:** This is a well-known, much talked about, category, and usually centres around grapes and chocolates. Often we hear stories along the lines of 'I'd been using grapes/raisins as training treats for years and my dogs have been fine' or 'my dog ate a whole slab of chocolate with its wrapping and she was fine'. Some say that it is only the raisin/grape-pip that is toxic to dogs, but truth lies elsewhere. It is not known when and why grapes and raisins cause poisoning. Again, such poisoning is not common, but this is how it goes: a dog eats a bunch of grapes and gets unlucky (there is a theory that it may be from a fungus on *that* particular bunch of grapes or packet of raisins); develops sudden vomiting and diarrhoea (which may contain grape/raisin skins); goes into acute oligouric renal failure (kidney failure with little or no urine production) and dies if not treated immediately; or survives, but with permanent kidney damage. As far as chocolate (or any coco containing product – this is important, including garden mulch, the stuffing in toys, and so on) is concerned the problem linked to the amount of Theobromine ingested over a particular period. It may come as a surprise to us that Theobromine is poisonous to humans too! The reason we ourselves are not dead by Easter Monday is because we are able to metabolise Theobromine faster than a dog can. It is also why the dog is often fine after eating chocolate: this may be because that particular chocolate was low in Theobromine (baking chocolate is the most toxic to dogs, by the

way; filled chocolates may be the least toxic, but the fat may cause a pancreatitis), low enough for the dog to metabolise successfully. When in doubt about what to do, phone the vet with the chocolate packaging in your hand. The vet will have your dog's weight on record, and may be able to calculate whether your dog has eaten a toxic dose of Theobromine or not. The toxins in grapes/raisins and chocolate do not accumulate, so the danger is always immediate.

The bottom line with all of these things is that, generally, it is going to be OK. There is not a lot out there that can kill your dog, despite what the press and social media sometimes put out. Remember when we were told that ice cubes could kill? I remember Elisabeth Matell phoning me in a panic about it. You may inadvertently poison your own dog, and you will feel bad about it, but with the help of the vet (and proper science) things generally end up being fine.

The other thing we have on our side is the liver. It is a wonderful, wonderful organ that is more than able to deal with most 'poisons' and other 'harmful' substances, and a healthy and useful liver is one that is kept 'in training'. A liver that is protected for all insults and onslaughts is not fit for purpose should a challenge arise, so let your dog live a busy and active life. My advice is simply keep an eye, be sensible, and be on good terms with your vet.