

Origins:

It's a rare pet owner who doesn't slip his critter the occasional treat. Our pets add so much to the quality of our lives that we look for ways to return the kindness, or to at least impart some measure of thanks for all they do. Yet though the urge to do good is there, the mechanism often isn't. Humans and the pets they keep have widely differing views on what constitutes welcome rewards or recognitions — your dog, for instance, wouldn't think much of a thank-you card, nor would your cat feel properly appreciated were he the recipient of a dozen roses presented in a nice vase. (Likewise, you would probably feel far less than delighted by the gift of a headless mouse.)



Yet food transcends the species. Almost every creature we would think to keep as a companion appears to take some delight in eating, so a gift of tasty yet out-of-the-ordinary ingestibles becomes a workable way of communicating "I love you," "Well done!" or just "Thanks." Unfortunately, good intentions can have deadly consequences when pet owners make the mistake of assuming all their favorite snacks are also suitable for their animals.

This sad tale about raisin toxicity began circulating on the Internet in April 2004. Unlike many of the pieces being forwarded from one inbox to the next, this one has a good deal to it.

According to the [ASPCA](#), around 1989 a disturbing trend began to emerge from the AnTox database used by its Animal Poison Control Center: Nearly all the dogs reported to have eaten grapes or raisins developed acute renal (kidney) failure. These cases were noted all across the USA, with the amount eaten varying widely, from over a pound of grapes to as little as a single serving of raisins.

The database showed that dogs who ate the grapes and raisins typically vomited within a few hours of ingestion. Most of the time, partially digested grapes and raisins could be seen in the vomit, fecal material, or both. At this point, some dogs would stop eating (anorexia), and develop diarrhea. The dogs often became quiet and lethargic, and showed signs of abdominal pain. These clinical signs lasted for several days — sometimes even weeks.

When medical care was sought, blood chemistry panels showed consistent patterns. Hypercalcemia (elevated blood calcium levels) was frequently present, as well as elevated levels of blood urea nitrogen, creatinine and phosphorous (substances that reflect kidney function). These chemistries began to increase anywhere from 24 hours to several days after the dogs ate the fruit. As the kidney damage developed, the dogs would produce little urine. When they could no longer produce urine, death occurred. In some cases, dogs who received timely veterinary care still had to be euthanized.

Although it is not known what component of the grapes or raisins causes renal failure in dogs, certain possibilities have been ruled out, including various pesticides, some heavy metals such as zinc and lead, and fungal contaminants. That dogs react in this fashion to both commercially-produced grapes and those grown informally in their owners' back yards indicates the likely culprit has nothing to do with the growing or cultivation process but is instead basic to grapes themselves.

In other words, all grapes are potentially dangerous to dogs — both grapes in the plump, "just picked" form and as their dried counterparts, raisins, and regardless of whether they came from the store or off the neighbor's vine. Don't feed your dog grapes or raisins, and don't leave these foodstuffs out where he could help himself to them.

This is not to say you need live in fear of your pooch's keeling over dead if he swallows a grape or two. However, if he downs a handful of grapes or even a smaller amount of raisins, get him to your veterinarian right away. Aggressive treatment with intravenous fluids and close monitoring are his best chance for survival.

Grapes and raisins aren't the only people foods known to be dangerous to man's best friend. [Chocolate](#) and cocoa can prove deadly to them, as can onions and macadamia nuts.