

APPROPRIATE TREATS

BY DR MICHAEL KIDD



A VET'S TIPS TO KEEP YOU FROM THE EMERGENCY ROOM

As pet owners, we often want to reward or give our pets treats—especially our dogs. Take a trip to your local pet store or supermarket and you'll find all sorts of packaged and unpackaged goodies. From slickly marketed bite-sized nibbles to massive dried bones. But sometimes not all pet treats are created equal in quality and safety. Dr Michael Kidd from Hurlstone Park Veterinary Clinic gives his advice on this issue.

1. Work out the reason you are giving the treat. Is it for dental care, training purposes, or to keep the pet busy for a while?

2. A one-size fit's all does not apply to treats. Some treats are more suitable to certain breeds and dispositions. For example, a Staffy with a powerful jaws would do well with a large hard bone whereas a toy-breed may be able to carry this around but not chew it or get any nutritional benefit from it. Sometimes 'Trial but not Error' works best. If in doubt, supervision is key as a small breed may be more prone to be blocked by fragments 'jamming up' at the back of the mouth—like the soggy remnants of a pigs ear.



3. Be aware that treats can cause friction and even fights in a multiple animal household. Resource guarding can be a problem in multi-pet homes. If there've been incidents or you're unsure whether a fracas could break out, separate pets when giving chew treats.

4. Treats for dental purposes could be pointless or even dangerous due to choking in an animal that doesn't chew and is a gulper. Many vets recommend raw chicken wings but only if the dog chews them and you supervise consumption.

5. It is wise to have your pets mouth professionally examined before starting treats. For example treats could be detrimental in animals with loose, infected teeth or an 'overcrowded mouth'.



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This is especially important if you've adopted a dog and are uncertain of their medical history.

6. It is best to be aware that there is a wide range of fat content in various treats—read the labels carefully. You may be adding to your pet's weight problem and therefore you should feed less of the animal's regular food when treats are added. The fat content is even more critical in certain disease situations eg diabetes, pancreatitis, inflammatory bowel disease etc. Often non-packaged treats like pig's ears, carry no nutritional breakdown or feeding guidelines, so fat content can be hard to guess.

7. Most people know NEVER give cooked bones but it's amazing how often we see constipation, or bowel blockages in dogs that have ingested cooked bones. At my practice, we recently operated on a Labrador which had got at cooked bones which fully blocked and perforated his bowel. Remember with their advanced sense of smell they find bins, bones at BBQs and discarded bones at parks.

8. A good rule of thumb is WATCH your dog carefully the first time you give a certain treat - is he chewing, are sharp bits breaking off, does some of it seem to get caught between his teeth. If he/she is clawing at the face, salivating, having breathing or swallowing troubles. Seek immediate veterinary attention if this happens.

9. Genuine rawhide type products are usually good for dogs with a full head of teeth because this mimics 'the wild' where dogs eat the whole carcass. The problem is knowing the source and therefore quality of these products.

10. Watch for signs after giving treats of any gastric upset. On numerous occasions I have been investigating causes of vomiting, loose faeces, gut pain etc. I usually get the clients to discuss the animal's diet with me but they omit to mention the treats because they don't consider them food. ANYTHING that is swallowed or even goes into your animal's mouth may be significant.

Dr Michael Kidd B.V.Sc from Hurlstone Park Veterinary Clinic is our guest vet commentator on the safety of treats. 739 New Canterbury Rd, Hurlstone Park NSW 2193 Phone: (02) 9558 4181 e: hpvets@optusnet.com.au



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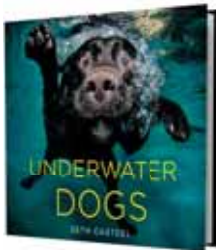


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