Yes, if that gum contains a product called xylitol. Xylitol is a sugar substitute that is used in products to prevent tooth decay, reduce plaque, as a sugar substitute for diabetics, and as a cooking ingredient to mention a few. It can be found in chewing gums, breath mints, sugar substitutes, nasal wash, toothpastes, candy, etc. Therefore, the product is readily available to your pet in your own household.

Depending upon the amount of xylitol in a product, as little as two sticks of a product such as Trident chewing gum could be toxic to a twenty pound dog. Products such as Kollerz and Ice Breakers contain large amounts while Orbit gum has smaller amounts. Since manufacturers are not required to report the exact amount of xylitol in their product, it is best to assume that ANY ingestion of xylitol by your dog could be potentially toxic.

Xylitol causes a severe drop in blood sugar (hypoglycemia) as early as 30 minutes after ingestion. Symptoms include weakness, depression, disorientation, stumbling, and seizures (convulsions). In addition to the hypoglycemia, some dogs may develop liver failure, which is far worse since this can be fatal.

There is no antidote for xylitol ingestion so treatment is directed at correcting the hypoglycemia and supportive therapy for possible liver damage.

If treatment can be instituted within 1-2 hours of ingestion, your veterinarian may try to induce vomiting in your dog. If it has been longer than 3 hours since ingestion, then induction of vomiting is not very helpful. Administration of intravenous glucose will usually be needed to correct the low blood sugar level and may have to be continued for up to 72 hours. Treatment for the complication of liver failure is strictly supportive and may be very difficult to reverse, therefore, preventing ingestion is the most important point for the owner to remember.

There are many new products released into the marketplace everyday that contain xylitol and since there is no antidote, the pet owner must be prudent to prevent ingestion by their dog. If you know that your dog has ingested a product containing xylitol, take your dog to your veterinarian immediately for evaluation.

The OSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital is open to the public and has a 24 hour emergency service, so please call 744-7000 if you have an emergency problem with your pet.

This column is provided by the faculty of the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital.

###