

# A warning for dog owners: Pug almost dies after eating breath mints

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[Mercury News](#)



Breath mints containing a sugar substitute called xylitol almost killed Harley

We humans spend small fortunes trying to find the best breath mints.

A couple of those little mints almost killed **Stephanie Lam's** pug, Harley.

Now she's on a bit of a crusade to warn other pet owners about the dangers of a chemical found in some common drugstore items that could be fatal to cats and dogs.

Stephanie does not take things lightly. The San Jose resident is the organizer of a couple of social groups - the San Jose Pug Meetup Group (<http://pug.meetup.com/529>) and the South Bay French Bulldog Meetup Group (<http://frenchbulldog.meetup.com/122>). The groups have about 500 members total, and each group meets separately once a month.

In addition to her pug, Stephanie has a French bulldog, as well as a rescued pit bull. In her spare time, she's an active member of Our Pack, a non-profit group that rescues and trains pit bulls.

Once she learned about the dangers to pets of xylitol, a sweetener used as a sugar substitute, she spent hours researching at the library and scouring store shelves to come up with a list of products that contain the chemical.

Here's Stephanie's story about Harley and the breath mints.

"Right before Christmas, my pug, Harley, ingested a couple of small breath mints containing xylitol, a . . . sweetener that is being used in breath mints, gum, mouthwashes and toothpastes," she says.

"It nearly killed Harley. Within hours, she went into acute liver distress. Her liver enzymes, which in a normal dog should be in the hundreds, were at 7,500. Her blood pressure was so low that my vet feared she would not be able to administer an IV catheter.

"Harley required two blood plasma transfusions and countless other medical treatments. I was extremely lucky that she even survived. The vet that saved her

specialized in toxicology and said that xylitol-related deaths and poisonings are becoming more common. I talked to the dog owners in my group, and none of them knew xylitol was toxic to dogs - nor what types of products contained it.

"I would like to see xylitol make it on 'the list' of toxic substances people know to keep their dogs away from - right along with antifreeze, chocolate and poinsettias."

Stephanie found the chemical in breath mints, toothpaste and mouthwash.

Several articles about the dangers have been published in veterinary journals.

One article in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association reported that xylitol poisonings jumped from 70 in 2004 to 170 in 2005.

As we fumble to get a breath mint out of the box, it's so easy to drop one on the floor of our house or car. And we all know how dogs are about sniffing things out. If there's something that smells good on the floor, they'll scarf it down in a heartbeat.

Experts had first thought the danger was only in products where xylitol was the main ingredient but have since found that smaller concentrations can be toxic as well.

For more information on xylitol and other products poisonous to pets, go to [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org) and click on Animal Poison Control in the left-hand column. Sadly, we often find out about a danger because our pet is already sick or dead. I'm really grateful to Stephanie for bringing this to our attention.

She and Harley had to find out the hard way, but at least Harley survived.