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Pet (Mis)Treats

By Tina Perry

"Snozzles" pork snouts, puffed cow ears, jerky flavored turkey necks, stuffed cow hooves, and the ever popular "Miss Porky" sow ears -- do these items sound more like the ingredients to a witches brew for Halloween than the makings of a "pet treat"?

Well, in reality, these delightful morsels are a bunch of discards from the human food industry, garbage from slaughterhouses that have been processed with chemicals, treated with preservatives, and flavored with artificial flavorings to create "treats" for unsuspecting consumers to feed to their companion animals.

A good clue as to what may be in those delicious goodies is the vomiting and diarrhea they sometimes cause in dogs. At one of the feedstores I occasionally visit with my greyhound Tallulah, one of the staff there is always very generous with doggie treats. He always slips her a little stuffed sausage roll while my back is turned, knowing full well that I would decline the offer if he asked my permission to give her one. The only problem is she tosses it back up on the car seat on the way home every time ...

Not quite as disgusting but a far cry from nutritious is another dog treat, the common everyday dog biscuit or "milk-bone." Most of these guys are made from all the ingredients and preservatives we have warned you about in the past -- such as meat meals (a rendered meal made from a variety of slaughterhouse discards and not-fit-for-human-consumption meats) and potentially harmful preservatives like BHA, BHT, and Ethoxyquin.

Although giving your dog or cat an occasional treat or using treats for training purposes are acceptable practices, be aware of what is in the treat you are providing. Most of the cream-colored rawhide chews we see are chemically treated or bleached to attain their appealing color. The chemicals that are used in this process are generally not listed on the package. Most of the sales staff I spoke with at pet supply stores could not tell me what was used to preserve these discarded body parts, such as pig snouts and cow and pig ears that they were selling. One person told me that the body parts are "dried and smoked, just like bacon." I would assume that includes the use of nitrates, the chemical used in smoking bacon, as well. It appears that unless the package states that only natural preservatives are used, there is no information readily available on what a product was treated with. These questionable items are not "treats" I would choose to feed my companion animals.

Not all treats are made equal, however. There are some healthy snacks available at your local pet supply. Treats like vegetable dog bones made from real carrots, cookies made

from real vegetables and apples, fresh baked lamb and rice biscuits and even "Pawpcorn," a natural popcorn treat, none of which contain any additives, preservatives or artificial flavorings. Another option is using fresh foods, such as carrot and apple slices or small pieces of other fruits as a treat for your companion animals. And let us not forget the best treats of all, giving your time and attention, as well as abundant praise to your dog or cat on a regular basis.