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The Danger Of Chocolate

Chocolate contains the substance known as theobromine, which can be toxic to dogs. While a humans system can metabolize theobromine efficiently, the half life (the time required for half the quantity of an ingested substance to be metabolized) in a dog or cat is 17.5 hours. As the animal struggles to excrete the substance, it affects the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system and blood pressure - placing severe strain on the animal's body, even to the point of causing death.

How much is too much?

It is important to know how much chocolate will produce toxic signs. The toxic dose is generally 100-150 milligrams per kilogram. Most chocolate contains from 40 to 140 milligrams per ounce of theobromine. So a 20 lb dog can eat approximately 1,000 milligrams or 10 ounces of chocolate before he will exhibit toxic signs. Another factor to consider is the kind of chocolate, since some chocolates are more toxic than others. Unsweetened or baker's chocolate contains 390 milligrams of theobromine per ounce - that is eight to 10 times the amount that milk chocolate has. So, just three ounces of baker's chocolate could be fatal to a 20-pound dog. Six to 9 ounces of semi-sweet chocolate or 20 to 30 ounces of milk chocolate could also prove fatal.

While it may seem unnecessary to worry about an occasional chocolate treat when looking at these statistics, it must be remembered that dogs cannot differentiate between the sweetness of milk chocolate and the bitter taste of baking chocolate. To dogs, one chocolate treat is just as good as the next.

Signs of toxicity

If your dog or cat has ingested chocolate, the signs will normally show up within 12 hours -probably less- of ingestion. The pet may exhibit nervousness and trembling, vomiting and diarrhea, excessive thirst and or urination, muscle spasms, seizures and possibly coma.



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According to the National Animal Poison Control Center (a division of the ASPCA), if you suspect or know that your pet has eaten chocolate, it is important to collect, if possible, any remaining chocolate or packaging or container in order to determine how much and what kind was consumed. Contact your veterinarian, **National Animal Poison Control 24 Hour Hotline 888-426-4435**, or local emergency veterinary clinic for advice on what action to take.

What will the vet do?

Once you get your pet to the veterinarian, several kinds of treatment may be employed. IV fluids may be introduced to prevent dehydration and help flush the system. Emetics (medications that induce vomiting) or activated charcoal (to absorb the toxins) may be given as well as anti-seizure medications for animals experiencing seizures or muscle spasms. For pets showing signs of irregular heart rhythms or rates, cardiac medications may be administered.