

When **Coco** gets into the **cocoa**

Chocolate makes the heart grow fonder ... and your dog grow sicker. Here are some semi-sweet facts on chocolate poisoning.

While the occasional chocolate chip within one cookie may not be an issue, veterinarians worry about certain types of chocolate that your dog might ingest—the less sweet and darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is to your pet. Dogs make up 95 percent of chocolate emergency calls (cats are usually too discriminating to eat chocolate) and in smaller dogs, even the wrappers from candy can result in secondary obstruction in the stomach or intestines.

What's in it?

When it comes to chocolate, remember: dark = dangerous. The darker the chocolate, the larger the amount of theobromine, a chemical cousin to caffeine. Thus, baker's chocolate, semisweet chocolate, cocoa powder and gourmet dark chocolates are more dangerous than milk chocolate. White chocolate has very little theobromine and will not cause chocolate poisoning in pets.

The threat to pets

It's the dose that makes the poison. Pets that ingest a few M&Ms or a couple bites of a chocolate chip cookie are unlikely to develop chocolate poisoning. Here's the rundown:

- > For milk chocolate, any ingestion of more than 0.5 ounces per pound of body weight may put dogs at risk for chocolate poisoning.
- > Ingestion of more than 0.13 ounces per pound of dark or semisweet chocolate may cause poisoning.
- > Almost all ingestions of baker's chocolate can result in poisoning and are considered emergencies.
- > Young animals, geriatric animals and animals with underlying disease must be treated more conservatively as they're more at risk for poisoning than healthy adult animals.
- > Due to the large amount of fat in chocolate, some pets may develop pancreatitis

(inflammation of the pancreas) after eating chocolate or baked goods containing chocolate.

Signs of chocolate poisoning

Ingestions of small amounts of chocolate may cause mild vomiting and diarrhea. Larger ingestions can cause severe agitation, elevated heart rate (tachycardia), abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, seizures and collapse.

Treatment

Your veterinarian or emergency care professional may need to induce vomiting and give multiple doses of activated charcoal to decontaminate your pet. Aggressive IV fluids are used to help with excretion, sedatives help calm the pet, heart medications reduce the heart rate and blood pressure, anticonvulsants help control seizures, and antacids (such as Pepcid) can relieve stomach discomfort and diarrhea. Theobromine may be reabsorbed across the bladder wall, so a urinary catheter or frequent walks are needed to keep the bladder empty.

Chocolate poisoning can be hard to decipher. If your dog has nibbled and you're at all concerned, call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline if you think it might be an emergency.



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