

Chocolate Poisoning in Dogs

By Cherie Weaver

While the pathetic begging look that comes across the face of a dog wanting chocolate can weaken the most stoic dog owner, stay firm. Do not give in! Once dogs have tasted chocolate, they want more. And for dogs, that's a very bad thing.

You might disagree, thinking back to a time when you noticed a dog enjoying a tidbit of chocolate with no negative effect. Don't be fooled.

The problem, according to veterinary experts, is that dogs, like humans, will crave the taste of chocolate, even after eating a small speck. However, unlike humans, our dogs won't know when to quit. This can lead to a very sick dog if he is able to find a large enough amount of chocolate. If it happens to be the more toxic chocolate, it could even lead to the dog's death. And, chocolate poisoning is not as uncommon in dogs as one might think.

Why is Chocolate Potentially Lethal?

Chocolate contains theobromine. A naturally occurring stimulant found in the cocoa bean. Theobromine increases urination and affects the central nervous system as well as heart muscle. While amounts vary by type of chocolate, it's the theobromine that is poisonous to dogs.

How Much Chocolate Is Too Much?

To answer the question "How much is too much" is not simple. The health and age of your dog must be considered, as well as the size and weight. In addition, not all chocolate has the same toxic levels.

White chocolate is the least toxic for dogs. It has only 1 mg per ounce of theobromine. The most toxic is baking chocolate, which has 450 mg of theobromine per ounce!

Here are a few other chocolates for you to ponder:

- Hot chocolate - 12 mg of theobromine per ounce
- Milk chocolate - 60 mg of theobromine per ounce
- Semi-sweet chocolate - 250 mg of theobromine per ounce

The following are examples of how much can be too much!

- *White Chocolate*: 200 ounces per pound of body weight. Example: It would take 125 pounds of white chocolate to cause signs of poisoning in a 10-pound dog.
- *Milk Chocolate*: 1 ounce per pound of body weight. Example: Based on an average chocolate bar containing 2 to 3 ounces of milk chocolate, it would take 2-3 candy bars to poison a 10 pound dog. A Semi-sweet chocolate bar would have a similar toxic level.
- *Sweet Cocoa*: 0.3 ounces per pound of body weight. Example: One-third of a pound of sweet cocoa is toxic to a 20-pound dog.
- *Baking Chocolate*: 0.1 ounces per pound body weight. Example: Two one-ounce squares of bakers' chocolate are toxic to a 20-pound dog.

Symptoms of Chocolate Dog Ingestion and Poisoning

You can recognize that your dog has eaten a toxic dose of chocolate from the symptoms. Within the first few hours, the evidence includes vomiting, diarrhea or hyperactivity. As time passes and there's increased absorption of the toxic, you'll see an increase in the dog's heart rate, which can cause arrhythmia, restlessness, hyperactivity, muscle twitching, increased urination or excessive panting.

This can lead to hyperthermia, muscle tremors, seizures, coma and even death.

Treatment:

If you suspect your pet has ingested a potentially dangerous amount of chocolate, contact your Vet immediately! They can help you determine the proper treatment for your pet.