

Chocolate Poisoning in Dogs

Each holiday season, veterinarians witness an increase in accidental chocolate poisoning in dogs. The majority of pet owners do not realize the potential for intoxication that chocolate possesses. Theobromine, caffeine and theophylline are all naturally occurring molecules that are found in several foods, plants, beverages and human and veterinary medications. Based on the number of calls received by The National Animal Poison Control Center and the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center, one of the most commonly encountered poisonings in pet dogs is theobromine, or chocolate, poisoning. Theobromine comes from the plant *Theobroma cocoa* and is present in chocolate, cocoa beans, cocoa bean hulls, cola and tea.

Milk chocolate is obtained from seeds of *theobroma cacao* after fermentation and roasting. Milk chocolate has about 44 mg/ounce of theobromine; a 4.5 oz. milk chocolate bar has about 240 mgs. of theobromine. Unsweetened baking chocolate has even more -- about 390 to 450 mgs of theobromine per ounce.

Relative theobromine content per ounce for various products is:

- Milk chocolate: 44 - 60 mgs/ounce
- Unsweetened baking chocolate: 450 mg/oz
- Cacao meal: 300 - 900 mg/oz
- Cacao beans: 300 - 1200 mg/oz
- Hot chocolate: 13 mg/oz

The lethal dosage of theobromine in dogs is between 250 and 500 mgs/kg, or about 2/3 to 1 1/3 of baking chocolate for every 2.2 pounds of body weight. However, serious non-fatal poisonings have been reported in dogs after eating smaller amounts.

The first signs of chocolate poisoning are lethargy, excessive drooling, heavy panting, vomiting and diarrhea, increased urination and nausea. These can progress to cardiac arrhythmias and seizures. Dogs definitely have a sweet tooth.

Dog-proof your home to keep your dog safe. Milk chocolate should never be given to your pet and it should be kept well out of reach. Unsweetened baking chocolate should be kept in closed containers in upper, latched cupboards.

If your dog eats potentially dangerous amounts of chocolate and you can get the pet to your vet within two hours, vomiting can be *induced to remove the poison. If longer than two hours has passed, the animal may need to be seen and treated.

Direct any questions you may have to your veterinarian, regional poison control center, or the National Animal Poison Information Center at The University of Illinois in Urbana which provides computer-supported telephone consultation for potential poisonings. <http://www.napcc.aspc.org>

or call the toll free number: (888) 252-7387.

It is our responsibility to keep our animals safe. Protect your dogs from their own sweet tooth. Occasional treats are okay, but keep your dog away from candy bars.

*To induce vomiting pour 2 tablespoons of Peroxide down the dog's throat, repeating procedure until dog vomits.

This information has been compiled by the Southeastern Newfoundland Club, as part of their comprehensive rescue program. We are grateful for their generosity in sharing all of their hard work.- NCA 2006