

Chocolate

Chocolate poisoning in dogs is the first thing that usually comes to mind when thinking about natural poisons to dogs, something that most households have lying around the house. Chocolate chip cookies, chocolate candy bars, etc., are in just about every kitchen and yet it is one of the most lethal substances a dog can ingest.

A big problem with chocolate and its poisonous nature is many fold – many inexperienced dog owners have never heard of such a thing, and feed their dog chocolate like they would share anything else they might have in their hand. Small amounts of chocolate, chocolate flavored cake or ice cream that doesn't have the deadly variety of the toxin, lead these people to develop habits of feeding chocolate to their dogs – completely unaware of the serious danger they are putting their dog in. Dogs love chocolate (a huge problem) and once they have had it, even just a small amount, will begin to develop a craving for it – no different from us humans! Most dogs have a sweet tooth and this is a perilous scenario when it comes to chocolate as they will seek it out if they smell it around the house, knowing that it is a treat that they have enjoyed before.

Signs and Symptoms of Chocolate Poisoning

Poison by chocolate can occur quickly if your dog had a large amount, but sometimes even small amounts will show signs of poisoning within a few short hours. Symptoms include vomiting and diarrhea, restlessness and hyperactivity, and he or she might even go to you for help and answers. Symptoms will progressively get worse from restlessness to arrhythmia and other muscle twitching. Frequent urination is common, a direct side effect of the toxin in chocolate.

If you know your dog had chocolate and even the first signs develop, call a veterinarian right away. If you are unaware of your dog eating chocolate but develop these symptoms, this might also be a sign of another poison and you need to find a doctor immediately. If symptoms in chocolate poisoning don't decrease at this point, they will probably increase to hyperthermia and seizures, which can quickly escalate to a coma. Death follows shortly.

Why is Chocolate so Poisonous?

Chocolate contains a natural occurring stimulant called theobromine found in the cocoa bean plant *Theobroma cocoa*, the bean that makes chocolate. Theobromine is the poison as it affects the central nervous system, as well as the heart of the dog, throwing their system into panic which often manifests in the form of epileptic seizures.

How Much Chocolate is Poisonous to Dogs?

This can be difficult as all dogs are different - factor in the specific kind of chocolate and the weight of the dog, their age and health, and it can be hard to tell. Here are a few charting lists of information that may help to understand better:

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

Relative chocolate content per pound of [body weight](#):

- Baking Chocolate: 0.1 oz/.lb
- Milk Chocolate: 1oz/.lb
- Sweet Cocoa: 0.3/.b
- White Chocolate: 200oz/.lb

As you can see different varieties of chocolate have different levels of toxicity – with Bakers Chocolate containing the most Theobromine content while white chocolate has the least amount of danger. This isn't an accurate representation to go by as we mentioned above as there are many other factors that play into this. Vets have reported some cases where animals under 20 pounds have died after eating just small bites of chocolate.

Treating Chocolate Poisoning

To treat a dog with chocolate poisoning you will first have to be prepared for such an event by stocking up on an activated charcoal substance and a bottle of hydrogen peroxide or Syrup of Ipecac. Build a small emergency kit with these essential ingredients as they will be effective with several varieties of plant and chemical toxins.

Activated charcoal such as Taliban (ask your vet for a bottle to keep on hand for emergencies) comes in a few different varieties; charcoal tablets, powder, or even a thick liquid form. The processed charcoal works to bind itself to poison thus preventing the processing and absorption into the blood stream of your pet. It has also been said that burnt toast will work in the same way but would only be recommended if you were stranded on the moon. In other words, make yourself prepared as it is your dogs life at stake.

The hydrogen peroxide is used to induce vomiting. Mix three percent hydrogen peroxide to water solution and give your dog 1-2 tea spoons for a smaller dog, 3-4 tables spoons for a larger dog, by mouth every 10-15 minutes until you produce vomiting.

To treat your dog of poisoning, first induce the vomiting. Once this has occurred you need to administer the charcoal. The sooner your dog ingests the charcoal, the sooner you can deactivate the dangerous effects of the poison. If you procured your charcoal from your vet, follow their instructions for the dosage amount to provide. If you got it from a pharmacy follow this general rule: 1 teaspoon for 25 lb. or less and two teaspoons for dogs weighing more.

Preventing Chocolate Poison in Dogs

Be extra vigilant around the holiday seasons as that is when chocolate happens to be around more, sitting in candy dishes for guests, in gift boxes, as well as baked items. In the kitchen, dog proof your baking items particularly the unsweetened or semi-sweet baking chocolate with locking containers and put them in cupboards that are child resistant.

If you (like me) have a habit of sharing your finger foods with your dog you always have to tell them no when you have any sort of chocolate. Eventually – they will learn to associate the scent as something they just simply can not have – and will usually just leave you alone.

Emergency Procedures - What to Do if Your Dog Gets Chocolate Poisoning

If your pet eats any amount of chocolate, call your veterinarian right away for advice. If you suspect your pet has had a particularly lethal amount, take he or she to the vet right away.

Alternatively, you can call the National Animal Poison Control Center at:
1-900-680-0000