

Chocolate Toxicity

It is said that men cannot live on chocolate alone but that woman sure can! However one thing that is sure is that your dog cannot live on chocolate; it is actually poisonous to them! Chocolate contains theobromine, which our pets are far less tolerant of than humans. It is most toxic to cats, but they will rarely eat it, while dogs will often consume large quantities of it if given the chance. Dark chocolate is much more dangerous than light chocolate or chocolate 'candies' as the concentration of theobromine is much higher (up to 10 times as much).

The first signs of theobromine poisoning are nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, and increased urination. These can progress to abnormal heart beats, fits, internal bleeding, heart attacks, and eventually death.

In dogs, the half-life of theobromine is 17.5 hours, so in severe cases clinical symptoms of theobromine poisoning can persist for 72 hours. Medical treatment performed by a veterinary surgeon may involve inducing vomiting within two hours of ingestion and administration of drugs to control seizures, heart arrhythmias, and fluid build up in the body.

A typical 20 kg (44 lb) dog will normally experience intestinal symptoms after eating less than 240 g (8.5 oz) of dark chocolate, but may need to eat double this amount to cause heart problems and possible death. However some dogs will develop symptoms by eating much less than this especially if the chocolate is very rich.

Christmas is a time when it is common for dogs to develop chocolate poisoning. It was Christmas Eve last year when Jason, a large Labrador, coincidentally chocolate coloured, arrived at my surgery. His owners had been to a carol concert leaving Jason 'home alone'! His astute nose soon picked up that sweet smell from behind the closed door which tingled his taste-buds. Suppertime was still several hours away, and he was feeling peckish, so he could not resist pawing at the door. Nothing doing so he pushed at it with his shoulder. Unfortunately it had not quite latched and the door flew open presenting Jason with the sight of a beautifully decorated tree with twinkling lights. It was not this however that caught Jason's attention but rather the collection of gift wrapped parcels beneath the tree from where that delicious odour was coming from. A quick nose around among them led him to several that he immediately decided needed further investigation. He ripped off the

wrapping with his teeth to discover the chocolate delights within. In no time at all he had devoured the lot including the wrappings! He knew at once he was in the wrong and slunk back into the kitchen and hid under the table where he started to develop an unpleasant ache in his stomach!

Fortunately for Jason his owners arrived back shortly after this happened and, having seen the devastation under the Christmas tree, immediately rang the surgery. He was given an injection to make him sick and soon recovered his good humour and vast appetite! However it could have been so different if Jason's owners had been delayed in their return and they are now always extra careful to keep him away from chocolate.

So with this year's festive season fast approaching, take care that your pet does not get given, or gain access to, chocolate. Then hopefully you can all enjoy a peaceful and a very Happy Christmas!