

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS



Why is Chocolate Toxic to Pets?

Almost everyone knows that dogs and cats shouldn't eat chocolate, but why is the sweet stuff so toxic to our furry friends? The answer is quite a mouthful—in a word, methylxanthines. Methylxanthines are chemicals in chocolate like theobromine and caffeine. They are toxic because, unlike humans, our pets' bodies do not break down these compounds quickly, so they remain in the body for a long time. These substances can cause vomiting, diarrhea and more serious effects like increased heart rate and seizures or even coma and death.

Cocoa powder contains the highest levels of methylxanthine at 800mg/oz while milk chocolate has only 64mg/oz. However, as little as one ounce of chocolate per pound can be lethal. Mulch made from cocoa bean hulls contains theobromine at as much as 265mg/oz and can also be toxic to dogs and livestock (merckmanuals.com).

Toxic effects of chocolate can be seen in as little as 6-12 hours after ingestion. Treatment of chocolate toxicity usually involves supportive care such as IV fluids and medications to control heart arrhythmias and seizures if present. If the pet is seen soon after ingestion, vomiting may be induced and activated charcoal may be given orally to prevent further absorption of theobromine and caffeine.

So, even though chocolate is a tasty treat for people, pets should never be given chocolate. If a pet accidentally ingests a very small amount, he or she is likely to be fine. But remember that even small amounts of cocoa powder and other dark chocolates contain large amounts of methylxanthines and your pet, especially a small dog and cat, may not need to ingest a large amount to be fatal. So make sure to keep that chocolate out of reach of pets!

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