



Chocolate Toxicity in Dogs

One of the most common toxicities in dogs is caused by chocolate ingestion. Dogs cannot metabolize chocolate in the same way people can, so keeping chocolate or products containing caffeine in a secure location out of your dog's reach is essential. The amount ingested that can cause toxicity depends on the size of the dog and the type of chocolate, with darker and more bitter chocolates being the most toxic.

Chocolate contains theobromine and caffeine, which are similar compounds and cause similar clinical signs such as an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, agitation, tremors, and seizures. The darker the chocolate, the more theobromine it contains. While rarely fatal, chocolate ingestion can result in significant illness. Dogs metabolize theobromine and caffeine differently than people, making them more sensitive to the chemicals' effects.

The clinical signs seen vary based on the amount of chocolate ingested and the dog's size but may occur within 2-12 hours after ingestion. Clinical signs can last 12-36 hours, sometimes longer in severe toxicities. The signs of chocolate toxicity may include the following:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Increased thirst and urination
- Restlessness
- Increased respiratory rate
- Increased heart rate or irregular heart rhythm
- Hyperexcitability
- Tremors
- Incoordination
- Seizures
- Fever
- Coma

Even if the dose of theobromine is not toxic, dogs can still develop vomiting, diarrhea, or pancreatitis from the fat and sugar in chocolate.

Contact your veterinarian, Pet Poison Helpline at 1-800-213-6680, or the Animal Poison Control Center 888-426-4435 to see if a poisonous amount of chocolate has been ingested. If a toxic amount was ingested, immediate evaluation by a veterinarian will be recommended. The sooner treatment begins, the better your dog's prognosis and the less costly the treatment.

***Consultations with Animal Poison Control are approximately \$100 but if your pet has a HomeAgain microchip and is enrolled in the full-service registration program, poison control consultations are free. Call 1-888-HomeAgain and select the option for "medical emergency."*

***Consultations with Pet Poison Helpline are \$85*

Treatment of chocolate toxicity consists of first removing as much chocolate from the body; this is done by either inducing vomiting or administering activated charcoal - this absorbs the chocolate in the stomach. If too much chocolate has already been absorbed, a dog will require supportive care. Supportive care can consist of any of the following, and some pets may require treatment for multiple days:

- IV fluids
- GI protectants
- Anti-nausea medications (after inducing vomiting)
- Medications to stop tremors
- Medications to prevent irregular heart rhythms

- Medications to stop seizures

The outcome of chocolate toxicity depends on the amount and type ingested, the dog's weight and how promptly treatment was initiated. Delaying treatment from the time a dog eats chocolate can worsen the associated clinical signs and prognosis. The prognosis is less favorable for dogs with severe clinical signs like seizures or collapse.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" - Keep all chocolate treats where pets cannot reach them.