

Chocolate poisoning in dogs

The problem is that eating a small piece of chocolate leads a dog to crave more. It can mean that your dog will jump at an opportunity to steal any type of chocolate, not knowing that certain chocolates are more lethal than other types.

Larger amounts of chocolate, particularly dark chocolate, that has a higher concentration of the toxic chemical theobromine, can bring about severe heart and nervous system changes in some dogs leading to coma and death and at a milder level can cause a nasty gastrointestinal upset.

Why is chocolate poisonous?

Chocolate contains **theobromine**. A naturally occurring stimulant found in the cocoa bean, theobromine increases urination and affects the central nervous system as well as heart muscle. While amounts vary by type of chocolate, it's the theobromine that is poisonous to dogs.

Symptoms of chocolate dog ingestion and toxicity

You can recognize that your dog has eaten a toxic dose of chocolate from the symptoms. Within the first few hours, the evidence will include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Hyperactivity
- As time passes and there's increased absorption of the toxic substance, you'll see an increase in the dog's heart rate, which can cause arrhythmia, restlessness, hyperactivity, muscle twitching, increased urination and/or excessive panting.

This can lead to hyperthermia, muscle tremors, seizures, coma and in some cases sadly death.

How much chocolate is toxic?

If a 25kg dog ie, a Labrador eats a teaspoonful of milk chocolate, it's not going to cause serious problems. However, if that same dog gorges himself on a two-layer chocolate cake, his stomach will feel more than upset and it's likely he'll soon be vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea.

To answer the question '*How much is too much*' is not that simple to answer. The health and age of your dog must be considered. Obviously, if your dog is older and not in tip top shape, his reaction to a plate of chocolate is going to be different from a young healthy dog of the same weight.

Another fact that must be considered is that not all chocolate is the same. Some has a small amount of theobromine; another type may have a large amount and yet another could contain an amount that is somewhere in between.

The quantity has a relationship with the weight of your dog. Small dogs can be poisoned from smaller amounts of theobromine than larger dogs.

Knowing which chocolate is the most toxic is important, but you might wonder how much must be eaten to poison a dog. At Hillside Vets if we have any concerns about the type or quantity of chocolate that has been ingested we will usually make the dog sick. Also if necessary we will use a medicine to try and prevent further absorption of the chocolate from the intestinal tract.

Please see the list below of the quantities of particular chocolate type that can be toxic to dogs:

- **Milk chocolate:** Approximately 500g of milk chocolate is poisonous to a 10 kg dog.

The average chocolate bar contains 56g to 85g of milk chocolate. It would take 2-3 chocolate bars to poison a 5kg dog.

Semi-sweet chocolate has a similar toxic level.

- **Dark chocolate:** 150g of dark chocolate is toxic to a 10kg dog; 90g for a 5kg dog.

- **Baking chocolate:** Two squares of 28g baking chocolate is toxic to a 10kg dog; one square of 28g for a 5kg dog.

If you are at all concerned that your dog has eaten chocolate you should contact your vet immediately for advice. It's always best to ring first to ensure that someone is at the surgery to take care of your pet.

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