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CHOCOLATE TOXICITY

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With Valentine's Day and Easter on the way, thoughts of love and celebration are near to the heart and mind. What says "Happy Valentine's Day" like a box of chocolates? What is an Easter basket without a chocolate bunny? In moderation these are tasty treats. But to our pets, they can mean and upset tummy or worse. Chocolate is made from the cacao bean which contains **theobromine**. The cacao bean is processed in different ways and other ingredients are added to make the various forms of chocolate we eat and cook with. The amount of theobromine in the chocolate varies depending on the form eaten. White chocolate contains very little theobromine. Milk chocolate a little more, semi-sweet chocolate a little more, dark chocolate a little more and baking chocolate has the highest amount.

We eat chocolate alone and we eat chocolate cooked into things like cakes and cookies. Most things we put chocolate into also contain a large amount of fat. The first concern we have for a dog that gets into a bag of chocolate chip cookies is the sudden ingestion of a large amount of fat. This can lead to pancreatitis, a potentially lethal condition where the pancreas becomes inflamed. Vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain lead to dehydration and a very sick pet.

The chocolate alone will also make a pet sick because of the theobromine. Toxic doses of theobromine cause vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, tremors, seizures, abnormal heart rate/rhythm, and death in severe cases. What the toxic dose is depends on the form of the chocolate ingested. The toxic dose for a 20lb dog eating milk chocolate would be 8 ounces. The same 20lb dog eating baking chocolate would reach a toxic dose ingesting 0.9 ounces.

There is no antidote for theobromine intoxication. It takes 3 or 4 days for the theobromine to work its way out of the dog's system so your veterinarian will support the pet's life systems during this process by giving intravenous fluids, controlling vomiting and sometimes giving sedatives to counter the stimulant effects. If caught within a couple of hours of ingestion, inducing vomiting and giving activated charcoal may reduce further theobromine absorption. Most pets treated for chocolate poisoning do recover and return to normal within a couple days.

So....enjoy the holiday and consider giving some chocolate to the one you love, unless your true love is your pet.

