

Media Release

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DoveLewis



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – February 8, 2011

The Best Way to Love Your Pets: Keep Chocolate Away

Here's a great excuse to hoard that Valentine's Day box of chocolates: chocolate is toxic and can be fatal for animals. Dogs are most at risk because they are typically more interested in eating things they shouldn't. Cats and other animals may also suffer the toxic effects of chocolate, however, they're usually pickier about what they eat.

Why is chocolate dangerous?

Cacao beans contain theobromine, which is toxic to animals. Humans aren't affected by this compound because we can break down and excrete it more efficiently. Its half life in a dog's body is 17.5 hours, but signs are most commonly seen within 12 hours (or less) of chocolate ingestion. Theobromine can stimulate the central nervous and cardiovascular systems and increase heart rate and blood pressure.

What are the signs of chocolate toxicity?

- Excitement, nervousness & trembling
- Vomiting & diarrhea
- Excessive thirst & urination
- Muscle spasms & seizures
- Coma & death

Why are some chocolates more toxic than others?

The more actual cacao bean in chocolate, the more dangerous it is. For example, chocolate that's closer to pure, like unsweetened, dark, and baker's chocolates contain 8-10 times the amount of theobromine as milk chocolate. White chocolate contains theobromine, but in such small amounts that poisoning is unlikely. Semi-sweet chocolate falls roughly in between the two. Caffeine, which can also be dangerous, is present in chocolate, but there is less of it in chocolate than theobromine.

But my dog ate a little bit of chocolate once and didn't get sick!

It all depends on the size of the dog, how much, and what kind of chocolate he ate. For example, a 50lb. dog would have to eat about 9oz. of milk chocolate (that's fewer than 7 chocolate kisses) to become sick. But if a 15lb. dog eats 2oz. of baker's chocolate, he would be at great risk. The same amount of white chocolate may give him only an upset stomach.

If you suspect your pet has eaten chocolate, call your veterinarian right away! He or she can help you determine the proper treatment for your pet. REMEMBER: each dog is different.

How is chocolate toxicity treated? There is no specific antidote for theobromine toxicity. Medical treatment is supportive. Veterinarians may use IV fluids to prevent dehydration and to flush the toxin out. They may need to induce vomiting, use activated charcoal, or in the most serious of cases, use anti-seizure and/or cardiac medications to reduce tremors and regulate heart rates.

DoveLewis is Portland's non-profit 24-Hour Emergency and ICU Animal Hospital, offering advanced veterinary care. DoveLewis also shares several 100% donor funded programs with the community including one of America's largest volunteer based animal blood banks, a partnership with Delta Society's animal assisted therapy program, a nationally recognized pet loss support program offering four free group therapy sessions each month, 24-hour stabilizing care for lost, stray and wild animals and financial assistance for qualifying low income families and abused animals. DoveLewis is also now open nights and weekends at the Oregon Coast, providing emergency and urgent care to residents and tourists.