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Toxin: Chocolate

The holiday season is a time filled with joy, laughter, and candy. Dogs (and some cats) love the sweet stuff and will binge on chocolate candies if they can get their paws on them. We have seen dogs eat whole boxes of candy, wrappers and all. Ingesting too much of anything can cause tummy trouble, but chocolate has other toxic properties as well. It contains two strong stimulants, caffeine and theobromine. Together they can cause numerous problems including vomiting, diarrhea, elevated blood pressure, heart arrhythmias, nervousness, seizures, coma, urinary incontinence, excessive panting, and death. There is no antidote to chocolate toxicity so early treatment and prevention are crucial.

Chocolate is very tasty and has a strong odor. Dogs and cats know where it is, even if you leave it lying on the counter. They still can grab it, even if it is in a box and presumably out of reach. Unsweetened chocolate is more toxic than milk chocolate. If your pet ingests chocolate, the toxic amount depends on your pet's size. One pound of milk chocolate or 3 to 4 ounces of unsweetened chocolate would be lethal to a 16-pound dog if left untreated. It is a good rule to call us immediately if your pet ingests chocolate. If they do ingest chocolate, what can we do? If it is within a matter a few hours, we can try to block the absorption of the chocolate by causing vomiting and using activated charcoal to decrease absorption. The sooner that we do this, the less chocolate that will be absorbed. If it is too late, we use supportive measures to try to keep the symptoms at bay while the liver tries to remove the toxins. Every holiday season, we see about 3-5 dogs that have eaten a lethal dose of chocolate. Please keep candies well away from your pet's reach, and if they do eat some, call us right away.