

Chocolate poisoning

Overview

- Chocolate contains a substance called theobromine, which is toxic to dogs and cats.
- The severity of chocolate poisoning depends on the amount and type of chocolate eaten - as a rule, the darker the chocolate, the bigger the risk.
- If your dog or cat has eaten chocolate, keep the packaging and call your vet immediately.

Why is chocolate poisonous to pets?

Chocolate contains a substance called theobromine, which is toxic to pets. Theobromine can damage the heart, nervous system, and guts. The severity of chocolate poisoning depends on the amount and type of chocolate eaten - as a rule, the darker the chocolate, the bigger the risk:

- White chocolate is low risk because it contains very little theobromine.
- Dark chocolate, cocoa powder and cocoa beans are high risk because they contain a lot of theobromine.



[Chocolate toxicity calculator](#)

Symptoms

Symptoms of chocolate poisoning usually appear within 2-4 hours (but can take as long as 24 hours), and can include:

- [Diarrhoea](#)
- [Vomiting](#)
- [Drinking and weeing more than usual](#)
- Being unusually excited and restless
- Painful abdomen (tummy)

Signs can then progress to:

- Fast breathing or panting
- Shaking or trembling
- High temperature (fever)
- [Seizures](#)
- A fast heartbeat
- In the worst cases, chocolate poisoning can lead to heart failure, coma and even death.

When to contact your vet

If you suspect your pet may have eaten chocolate, call your veterinary practice or the '[Animal Poison Line](#)' for advice. You will need to tell them roughly how much chocolate your pet ate, what type of chocolate it was, and when then ate it.

Treatment

It's important that your pet is treated quickly, before their body has a chance to digest the chocolate. The treatment they receive will depend on how much/what type of chocolate they have eaten, and may include

- **Induced vomiting** - if you can get your pet to the clinic quickly, your vet may give them an injection to make them sick.
- **Activated charcoal** - your vet may then give your pet a charcoal meal to absorb any remaining toxins.

- **A fluid drip** - depending on your pet's condition, they may need a fluid drip to support their vital organs while their body flushes out any toxins.

Outlook

With the right treatment, most pets make a full recovery, but it's important to act fast because in some cases, chocolate poisoning can be fatal if treatment is delayed.

Prevention

- Never feed chocolate to your pets (make sure any children in the house also know not to).
- Keep all chocolate, and chocolate containing products out of reach - store them in high or locked cupboards.
- Be particularly careful during Easter, Christmas and other events when there is likely to be lots of chocolate in the house.
- Avoid using gardening mulches that contain cocoa shell.

Cost

What an expensive snack! Treatment for chocolate poisoning can cost hundreds of pounds (depending on the treatment needed). Consider [insuring your pet](#) as soon as you get them (before any problems develop), to ensure you have the financial support you need if they become unwell. It's also very important to speak to your vet if you can't afford the treatment they have recommended because there may be other options.

Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?

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