

## **Chocolate Toxicity**

**IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR PET HAS EATEN CHOCOLATE, YOU MUST GET THEM TO THE VET!!**  
**DO NOT WAIT TO SEE IF THEY DEVELOP SYMPTOMS!!**

**In the lead up to Easter the chances of animals presenting with Chocolate (Theobromine) and caffeine toxicity are more increased as Easter egg hunts take place in households around Australia.**

Dogs are known for eating things when they are not supposed to. This is especially true of puppies. Also, dogs have an excellent sense of smell, making it fairly easy to find any secret hiding spots for chocolate. This can be a dangerous combination when there is chocolate around the house or children with Easter eggs.

The foil that encloses the chocolate can also be potentially dangerous to animals as it can form a foreign body which may block the intestine and consequently require invasive surgery to remove.

Although dogs are most commonly affected, it is important to remember that cats and other species of animals can also be susceptible to the toxic effects of chocolate, as well.

## **What makes chocolate toxic?**

Chocolate and cocoa are made from the fruit (beans) of the cacao tree.

The beans contain the compound Theobromine which is metabolised much more slowly in dogs and other animals than in humans. This inability for the body to clear the metabolites quickly results in chocolate toxicity.

Caffeine is a second toxic component of chocolate, although it is present in smaller concentrations.

It is important to note that Chocolate toxicity is not as much dependant on the amount of chocolate ingested, but more on the type of chocolate ingested. For example, white chocolate contains lower concentrations than cooking chocolate which contain the highest.

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Onset of clinical signs following ingestion of chocolate at a toxic dose is rapid. Due to the multiple effects theobromine and caffeine have on the body the following symptoms may be seen.

**Initial symptoms include:** hyperactivity, behaviour abnormalities and vomiting with possible diarrhoea.

Signs will progress rapidly to panting, cyanosis, increased heart rate, arrhythmias weakness/ataxia, diuresis resulting in increased urination, diarrhoea, severe hyperactivity, cardiac dysrhythmias (e.g. ventricular fibrillation) progressing to seizures than death.