

# Valentine, Easter & Passover **DANGERS**

## Chocolate Toxicity & Other Dangers

- \* **Valentine's Day** is a day of romance and love, renewing old friendships and making new. Please don't forget the hidden dangers to your pets in those wonderful boxes of candy gifts and lovely bouquets of flowers your beloved one gives you. Check [here](#) for a listing of toxic and non-toxic plants.



- \* Don't leave the candies out - most animals love the sweet taste, especially chocolate. Chocolate is often fatal to animals, especially cats, if consumed in a large quantity and/or over a period of time.



- \* **Easter** has its hazards of pets nibbling the colorful Easter "grass" used in baskets and other decorating. The goodies tucked in the baskets can create havoc to a pet's digestive system as well - chocolates, teeny Easter toys, plastic items, etc.

## Too much of a good thing...

### The importance of chocolate...

Valentine's Day and Easter are big "chocolate holidays". I require chocolate year round, and always have some stashed somewhere! Care must be taken when animals are around, though. Chocolate can be toxic, and sometimes even fatal, for animals. Dogs are most commonly affected, due to their ability to find it and the common 'sweet tooth' they seem to have. It is important to remember that cats and other species (i.e. rats, mice) are susceptible to the toxic effects of chocolate, too. Pictures & graphics are cute but do not represent the right thing to do.



### What makes chocolate toxic, anyway?

Chocolate is made from the fruit (beans) of the cacao tree. **Theobromine**, a component of chocolate, is the toxic compound in chocolate. (Caffeine is also present in chocolate, but in much smaller amounts than Theobromine.)

Theobromine's effect on the body:



- \* Central Nervous System (CNS) stimulant
- \* Cardiovascular stimulant
- \* Increase blood pressure (mild)
- \* Nausea and vomiting



### Are some chocolates more toxic than others?

**YES! ---->>>** Unsweetened (baker's) chocolate contains 8-10 times the amount of Theobromine as milk chocolate. Semi-sweet chocolate falls roughly in between the two for Theobromine content. White chocolate contains Theobromine, but in such small amounts that Theobromine poisoning is unlikely. Caffeine is present in chocolate, but less than

Theobromine.

### Quick Guide for Theobromine levels in different types of chocolate:

From *The Merck Veterinary Manual, 8th ed*

- \* Unsweetened (Baker's) chocolate = 390-450 mg Theobromine per oz chocolate
- \* Milk chocolate = 44-60 mg Theobromine per oz chocolate

Semi-sweet is a bit less than half of the Theobromine content as Baker's chocolate.



### How much is too much?

The toxic dose of Theobromine (and caffeine) for pets is 100-200mg/kg. (1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds). However, various reports by the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) have noted problems at doses much lower than this - i.e. 20mg/kg.



Translated to a "typical" scenario, and using the 20mg/kg as a measure of "problems can be seen at this level of ingestion", a 50 pound dog would have to consume 9 ounces (+/-) of milk chocolate to consume the 20mg/kg amount of Theobromine. Some dogs won't see problems at this rate. Some may.

This is a much more conservative toxic level calculation than the "standard" of 100-200mg/kg, but better safe than sorry. A large dog sneaking a couple M&M's shouldn't have a problem, but it isn't a good habit to get into! A teacup or toy dog sneaking a couple of M&M's could be deadly.

### What are the signs of toxicity?

Signs are most commonly seen within 12 hours (or less) of chocolate ingestion.

- \* Excitement / nervousness / trembling
- \* Vomiting / diarrhea
- \* Excessive thirst / sometimes excessive urination (at higher levels of toxicity)
- \* Muscle spasms
- \* Seizures
- \* Coma (rare)
- \* Death (rare) -- likely due to heart rhythm abnormalities.



### How is chocolate toxicity treated?

If you suspect that your pet has eaten chocolate (more than the stray chocolate chip that fell on the floor), call your veterinarian for advice. The toxicity of Theobromine is dose dependent. This means that the size of your pet, the type of chocolate, and quantity of chocolate determine if or how toxic it is for your pet. There is no specific antidote for Theobromine toxicity.

### Why isn't chocolate toxic to humans?

Humans can break down and excrete Theobromine much more efficiently than dogs. The half life of Theobromine in the dog is long; approximately 17.5 hours.

**Keep your pet's best interests at heart...chocolate wasn't meant to be shared anyway (grin).**



## Other Pet Hazards

As Easter approaches, many of us look forward to the excitement of Easter festivities like Easter egg hunts, Easter baskets filled with chocolate bunnies and jelly beans, and parades. But the joys of Easter can mean danger for your pets. Each year thousands of pets are injured and/or become deathly ill. To keep your pet safe, you should be aware of some common Easter pet perils.

**Easter Lilies** (and others such as the day lily and the tiger lily). For many,



the beautiful trumpet-shaped white flowers symbolize purity, virtue, innocence, hope and life -- the spiritual essence of Easter. Cat owners, however, need to be especially careful with these beautiful flowers because their leaves contain toxins that can cause severe kidney damage. So far, toxicity has not been reported in dogs.

Eating just one leaf of this toxic plant can result in severe poisoning and within a short time your cat will exhibit signs of toxicity. Minutes to hours after ingestion, your cat may stop eating and begin vomiting. As the toxins begin to affect the kidneys, your pet may become lethargic, and within five days, kidney failure will cause death.

If you suspect your cat has eaten part of a lily plant, it is important that you contact your veterinarian immediately. If treatment is started early, chances for recovery are good, but once the kidneys have been severely affected, your cat may not survive.

Obviously, the best prevention of lily toxicity is to keep the plants away from your kitty. If you bring Easter lilies into the house, keep them in a separate room where your nibbling cat cannot enter.

**Plastic Easter Grass and Other Goodies.** Like children, cats and dogs love to nibble on goodies in the Easter basket. Unfortunately, our curious pets enjoy everything in the basket, even the colorful plastic grass, toys and foil-wrappers on candies.



Take care to keep Easter baskets away from your dog and your cat. The plastic in Easter grass is non-digestible and can get caught in the intestines, leading to blockage and possible perforation. Cats love string-like objects and often play with the grass before eating it. Once ingested, the grass, as well as small plastic toys, can cause choking or become lodged in the stomach or intestines and create an obstruction.

Your pet may also ingest ribbons, bows, streamers and other decorative items – even ribbons and bows tied around their necks. Don't be tempted to decorate your puppy or kitty; they don't enjoy it and it may result in choking or strangulation. Keep these items away from your pet and throw candy wrappers in a covered trash can.

If you suspect that your pet has ingested something that may not pass through his intestinal tract, contact your veterinarian. Waiting until your dog or cat starts to vomit will make removal of the object more difficult and costly. Also, if you notice a sudden loss of appetite, vomiting, excessive drooling or abnormal bowel movements, consult with your veterinarian immediately.



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