

Chocolate is Poisonous to Dogs

What Daisy actually ate...

1 lb individually wrapped (foil) Rolos

1 lb candy-coated Hershey eggs

1 lb wrapped (foil) chocolate eggs

1 lb malted milk eggs

1 lb wrapped (foil) crisp chocolate assorted Easter candy

2 lbs jelly beans

Daisy, a 12 year old Golden retriever couldn't resist the brightly colored package on the dining room table pulling it down to the floor to investigate its content. Inside she found 6 pounds of chocolate her owners had purchased for the Easter holidays. Dogs consider chocolate a treat and soon Daisy had consumed the entire box of chocolates. When the owners returned home several hours later, Daisy was vomiting and nearly comatose. They rushed her to their veterinarian who quickly examined her. At this point, she was near death - she had slipped into a coma and her heart was racing. Her veterinarian transmitted an electrocardiogram to the Veterinary Heart Institute where a life-threatening cardiac arrhythmia was diagnosed. Daisy's heart was extremely unstable and she had developed a serious arrhythmia termed ventricular tachycardia. Her heart rate was nearly 300 beats per minute. Emergency care was instituted including lidocaine to stabilize her heart rhythm. She was also treated with corticosteroids and atenolol, a drug to block the toxic effects of chocolate on the heart. Daisy required 4 days of intensive care and finally came out of her coma. She is now walking and regaining strength and will likely fully recover. Daisy is lucky - most dogs consuming this amount of chocolate do not survive.

Chocolate contains theobromine (a compound similar to caffeine) which is poisonous to dogs. A dose of 50 mg/lb can be fatal to a dog. Milk chocolate contains 45 mg of theobromine per ounce and unsweetened baking chocolate contains 400 mg per ounce. Just one ounce of unsweetened baking chocolate can kill a small breed dog. Theobromine when ingested by dogs causes release of epinephrine (adrenaline) which causes the heart to race and serious cardiac arrhythmias to develop. Signs of chocolate poisoning in dogs include vomiting, diarrhea, excessive urination, hyperactivity followed by depression and coma, seizures, and death.

Emergency care for a dog ingesting chocolate includes inducing vomiting and administration of charcoal to reduce absorption of the chocolate remaining in the stomach and intestines. Drugs to stabilize the heart are needed as well as intravenous fluids and drugs to prevent shock. Mortality is high and care for these cases is intensive and expensive. Owners should be prudent to prevent dogs from finding and consuming chocolate. Theobromine is also present in cocoa beans, cola, and tea. If you suspect your dog has ingested chocolate, call your veterinarian immediately. With their instruction you may be able to induce vomiting greatly increasing the odds of your pet surviving. Time is of the essence in these cases - seek emergency care immediately if chocolate has been consumed. Keep chocolate and other products containing theobromine out of reach from your dogs. Instruct children and visitors to not feed you dog chocolate as a "treat"