

# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[printer friendly](#)

[download pdf](#)

Published November 12th, 2008

## CHOCOLATE - TASTES SO GOOD, BUT BAD FOR DOGS!

By Mona Miller, DVM



Labrador Kenna on a "stay" demonstrating how dogs might love chocolate! Photo Mona Miller

Chocolate is good for humans, with anti-oxidant and feel-good effects and a great taste! But as beneficial as might be for us, it is bad news for our animal friends. Cats are often not affected by chocolate toxicity, because they tend to be fairly discriminating eaters. Dogs, however, can get very sick and even die from chocolate ingestion. Chocolate contains an active ingredient called theobromine, which is a methylxanthine stimulant similar to caffeine. It affects the heart and nervous systems, causing hyperactivity, a rise in blood pressure, increase in heart rate and possible disturbances in the heart rhythm, muscle tremors, wobbliness and even seizures. Signs of toxicity can be seen within the first 4-12 hours after ingestion. It can take 4 days for theobromine to leave a dog's system. During this time, veterinary care would include causing vomiting, giving activated charcoal to bind remaining active ingredient, intravenous fluids and symptomatic treatment for the symptoms (i.e., anti-convulsant medication, cardiac drugs, gastrointestinal support).

The level of toxicity depends on the size of the dog, the amount of chocolate eaten and the type/darkness of the chocolate. In general, the small Maltese who eats a large amount of dark chocolate is a problem waiting to happen. Conversely, the large Rottweiler who grabs a couple of M&M candies from the floor will most likely experience no adverse effects at all. More specifically, for a 60lb Labrador to experience signs of toxicity, he would have to eat 25 oz of milk chocolate, or 8 oz of dark chocolate, or 2 3/4 oz of baking chocolate.

Another factor of chocolate toxicity concerns the amount of fat ingested suddenly. A large amount of sweetened milk chocolate candies contain a large amount of fat as well. Sudden fat ingestion stimulates the pancreas to produce digestive enzymes and can result in inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis). Common symptoms are not eating, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, belly pain and lying around. This can occur 1-3 days after the chocolate candies are eaten. In this case, it is the fat causing the problem, not the theobromine toxicity.

An interesting side note in California regards the increased use of cocoa bean hulls in mulch and fertilizer, and toxicity resulting in dogs with access to these garden areas. The dogs are attracted by the aroma of the chocolate. According to the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, 67% of reported cases of cocoa bean hull toxicity were from California dogs. Cocoa bean hulls contain 250mg per ounce of theobromine, putting it at about half the amount of Baker's chocolate.

Dr. Mona S. Miller lives in Lafayette with her 3 year old son and her yellow Labrador Retriever. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to [MonaSDVM@aol.com](mailto:MonaSDVM@aol.com).

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[back to top](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA