

## **SWEET BUT DEADLY**

**Have you ever eaten a whole bar of chocolate and felt rather poorly afterwards? Or felt a bit wobbly after drinking two to three cups of “real coffee”**

If the answer is “yes” you were experiencing the effects of the caffeine and other related chemicals found in tea, coffee and chocolate. In small amounts these chemicals make us feel more alert but taken to excess they can cause very unpleasant sensations of giddiness and irritability.

### **SO WHAT HAS THIS ALL GOT TO DO WITH YOUR FAMILY DOG!**

Not many dogs start the day with an espresso coffee. But most dogs **WOULD** start the day with a large bar of chocolate if it was left where they can find it! Dogs are much more sensitive to the toxic effects of theobromine, the active chemical found in chocolate. The main effects of theobromine are as a nervous stimulant, a gastric irritant and a diuretic. If a dog eats too much chocolate it shows a range of symptoms.

There would probably be vomiting followed by diarrhoea, due to the irritant effect on the stomach lining. Theobromine causes an increase in the heart rate and raises the blood pressure; the dog would probably start to pant. The effects of the chemical on the brain would cause restlessness and irritability, followed eventually by muscle jerks and finally convulsions. The diuretic effects make the dog urinate more than usual and so thirst increases to compensate. Drinking more may stimulate more vomiting. If the amount of chocolate eaten is great enough the dog may die.

### **DANGEROUS AMOUNTS**

How much chocolate is dangerous for an average dog? Suggestion is that an 100g bar of dark chocolate, is enough to kill a terrier sized dog! This is not a lot!! But, that’s the equivalent of a 10st human eating a 700g bar. This would certainly make us feel ill, but would not kill us.

The point being that dogs are easily able to eat a fatal dose of chocolate if they have access to it. The higher level of cocoa the greater the concentration of Theobromine.

Potential sources, cocoa powder, drinking chocolate, chocolate biscuits, Easter eggs, Christmas tree decorations, bars of chocolate and of course boxes of them. If you are a gardener, cocoa shell mulch should be avoided if you have a dog.

### **WHAT TO DO?**

**If your dog should accidentally eat a large quantity of chocolate, get it to a vet as soon as possible.**

If it has not been long since the “crime” occurred, it may help if vomiting is induced or the stomach is washed out to remove as much Theobromine as possible before it is absorbed into the bloodstream. There is no antidote for Theobromine poisoning.

It is unlikely that the odd chocolate button here or there will make your dog ill, unless of course it is a very small dog. Doggie choc buttons are ok as the Theobromine has been removed.

Theobromine poisoning can happen in any home, so, remember to be careful where you leave your shopping bag, take out the chocolate before you put the kettle on, and no choccie treats on the tree if we have dogs in the house.