

## **SICK OF CHOCOLATE**

Dear Cecil:

I was intrigued by your column on chocolate poisoning in dogs, but don't you think we have an overeating problem here rather than one of poisoning per se? You mention a **toxic threshold of two ounces of milk chocolate per kilo of body weight**. For my Jenny, who weighs 20 kilos (44 pounds), that's 40 ounces of chocolate! (Toxicity **for a 10 kilo dog = 20 oz of milk chocolate** ,  $20 \text{ oz} \times 65 \text{ mg/oz}^* = 1300 \text{ mg}$  of theobromine = **7.8 oz of semisweet chocolate.**)

Let's put the issue in human terms. I'm a big boy at 100 kilos. If I ate 200 ounces (12.5 pounds) I think I'd get mighty sick, and I don't think we could blame it on the chocolate.

Cecil replies:

You ever watch your dog eat? Dogs will make pigs of themselves if they get unlimited access to a food they like. Vets at the National Animal Poison Control Center say it's not uncommon for a 10- to 15-pound dog to eat a pound of chocolate, wrappings and all. The bigger breeds, proportionally speaking, are almost as bad.

It's true that at extreme doses the sheer volume of fatty food can cause problems such as pancreatitis, which is often the culprit when a dog gets sick after eating garbage. But chocolate alone is plenty toxic. This is more apparent in the concentrated forms of chocolate. I cited the toxic threshold for milk chocolate because, being sweet, it's what dogs gorge on most often. But where **\* milk chocolate contains 65 milligrams of caffeine and theobromine per ounce, semisweet chocolate contains 165 milligrams** and baking chocolate has 300 to 400. A dog who eats a package of baking chocolate isn't necessarily overeating but could still wind up dead.

Theobromine is one of a class of chemical compounds called methylxanthines, which also include caffeine and theophylline (found in tea). They're all stimulants and not good for your pooch (or for you, for that matter) in excess.

— Cecil Adams