



Beware of Food that is Toxic to your Pet this Easter!

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The Easter holiday period often involves sharing delicious treats and chocolate with friends and family, but this can result in disastrous consequences if you involve your furry friend in the fun.

Chocolate toxicity

Did you know that chocolate can be poisonous to dogs and cats? Depending on the amount consumed, chocolate consumption in pets can be life-threatening.

Clinical signs of chocolate toxicity include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Heart arrhythmias
- Tremors and seizures
- Death

Dogs and cats have a low tolerance to the methylxanthine chemicals, theobromine and caffeine, found in chocolate. In general, dark and cooking chocolate are more toxic than milk chocolate, and the severity of clinical signs is based on the type of chocolate eaten as well as the weight of your pet. Our practice website has a chocolate toxicity calculator on our website to work out whether a toxic amount of chocolate has been consumed.

Let's look at a couple of examples.

A 30kg Labrador dog that consumed a 180g slab of dark chocolate can experience signs of poisoning, whereas the same amount of milk chocolate consumed would unlikely result in any danger to the dog.



On the other hand, a 3kg Chihuahua eating a 100g milk chocolate Easter Egg could potentially be fatal.

It's best to seek veterinary advice if you suspect your dog or cat has eaten chocolate as in many cases, we will advise to bring your pet in immediately to induce vomiting and potentially use other methods of decontamination as well.

It can take up to 4 days for your pet's body to be rid of all the toxins from chocolate. So if your dog or cat has a cardiac arrhythmia or has developed seizures due to chocolate toxicity, then hospitalisation will be required to stabilise your pet with anti-arrhythmic and/or anti-seizure medications, or a trip to emergency vet if the clinical signs develop after hours.

Grape, raisin and sultana toxicity

We all love our hot cross buns at Easter time, but many contain sultanas and raisins, which even in tiny quantities, can be toxic if eaten by dogs and cats. It's only been in the last 20 years that veterinarians have realised that grapes, raisins and sultanas are dangerous in dogs. Cats generally won't eat them, so we don't usually see this toxicity in cats so much. Dogs on the other hand, will happily eat them, or worse still, chocolate-coated sultanas!

In some dogs, eating just one small serving can result in acute kidney failure, whereas many dogs can tolerate eating a larger amounts without harm. It's impossible to predict which dogs will develop potentially fatal toxic effects from grapes, sultanas and raisins, so until further research emerges in the field of veterinary toxicology, we need to treat all cases of ingestion in a similar manner.

Clinical signs of grape, raisin or sultana toxicity include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Poor appetite



- Lethargy
- Abdominal pain
- Inability to produce urine
- Death

If your dog has eaten a single grape, then inducing vomiting and then monitoring renal parameters via a blood test may be sufficient. The challenge is if your dog eats multiple grapes, raisins or sultanas and we cannot determine whether all of them have been brought up in the vomitus. In these cases, we may recommend hospitalisation on intravenous fluids for 48 hours until we can be certain that your dog is producing urine properly and there are no elevations in the kidney parameters on serial blood tests. If there are no changes to the renal blood parameters within 3 days of ingestion, then it is unlikely that kidney failure will occur.

Unlikely chocolate toxicity in pets, there is great variability in susceptibility to this toxin and it is not possible to predict which individuals will develop kidney failure. So, it's best to prevent access to these altogether, even in small quantities. If your dog has eaten even just a single grape, raisin or sultana then you will need to make a vet appointment urgently to induce vomiting.

Pancreatitis

During the Easter break, our practice sees a surge of canine pancreatitis cases because there is a lot of sources of fatty food being served at family get-togethers and BBQ lunches, such as rich sauces, cheese, bacon, sausages and creamy desserts. Unlike humans, a dog's gastrointestinal system cannot handle a diet high in fat content. In fact, this can trigger a nasty cascade of events leading to pancreatitis – severe inflammation of the pancreas, which is the organ responsible for digestive enzyme production as well as insulin production.

Clinical signs of pancreatitis include:

- Vomiting



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- Abdominal pain
 - Lethargy
 - Fever
 - Collapse
 - Death

Pancreatitis in dogs needs to be addressed urgently, often as a hospital patient, with intravenous fluid therapy, pain relief and sometimes antibiotics if indicated. Treatment continues until the pancreas settles down and the inflammation has resolved. Without prompt treatment, pancreatitis in some cases can be fatal, so be sure to seek veterinary treatment immediately if you suspect your dog has pancreatitis.

It is best to avoid pancreatitis in the first place by ensuring the human food is out of reach of your dog and not offering the left-overs after a BBQ lunch!

Remember an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure! So always keep these dangerous foods out of reach from your pet.