



FACT SHEET

Food You Love Could Kill Your Pet

No matter how closely you relate to your pet, you're different from each other. So much so that some of your favourite foods contain chemicals that are actually poisonous to animals, notably *chocolate*, *macadamia nuts*, *onions* and *garlic*. Luckily, not all pets are always affected, but because you can't be sure which are susceptible to the poisons, you need to be very careful with what you feed them.

Chocolate

We're talking about the chocolate that we humans crave, not the sort that is used in some pet treats. Our chocolate contains *theobromine*, a compound that acts as a cardiac stimulant and a diuretic. The most toxic forms are cocoa powder and cooking chocolate, which contain 10 times more theobromine than milk chocolate. Semi-sweet chocolate and dark chocolate are the next most dangerous forms. And the smaller the dog the more likely it will be affected. (Even licking icing from a cake could make a Peke puke.)

When a dog ODs on chocolate, it can become excited and hyperactive. The diuretic effect may lead to the passage of large volumes of urine and unusual thirst. Not to mention vomiting and diarrhoea. However, it's the way theobromine affects a dog's heart that causes the most worry. An increase in heart rate or an irregular heart beat could result in seizures or even the dog's death, especially if exacerbated with exercise.

Just because a dog appears normal after eating a large quantity of chocolate doesn't mean it's okay. The signs of poisoning might not show up for several hours... and if left untreated may result in death within 12-36 hours.

Onions and garlic

Both bulbs contain *thiosulphate*, but onions are the more dangerous, particularly to dogs, cats and livestock. All it takes is a single ingestion of 600 to 800 grams of raw onion or eating 150 grams for a few days to cause haemolytic anaemia where the animal's red blood cells burst while circulating throughout its body.

The first outward signs of onion toxicity are vomiting and diarrhoea due to gastroenteritis along with a loss of interest in food. Affected animals will also seem dull and weak, then breathless because of the reduced number of red blood cells to circulate oxygen. You could also see red pigment from the burst blood cells in the animal's urine.

The condition will improve once you cut out all onions and garlic.

Macadamia nuts

For those who can afford to share macadamias with their dogs, be aware that both the raw and roasted varieties can be dangerous. At this point no one knows for sure which chemical causes the toxicosis. What we do know is affected dogs can show marked weakness in their legs, depression, vomiting, a lack of coordination, tremors and hyperthermia, generally within 12 hours.

Fortunately, most dogs recover completely within 24 to 48 hours.

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