

Stories From Our Clinic: The Chocolate-Eating Poodle

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



This is a true story. . . one of the interesting cases that Drs. Foster and Smith have encountered. We sincerely hope you enjoy this fascinating and educational tale.

Although this story is about Christmas, we feel it applies to any holiday that involves chocolate whether it's Easter, Halloween, or even Valentine's Day!

Marji, a four-year-old Standard Poodle, was a healthy and happy dog ever since we first met her as a puppy. Poodles are considered some of the most intelligent canines, and Marji was no exception. So when the holidays came around, her owner thought nothing of stashing presents under the Christmas tree, including a small gift from her neighbor. Debbie went to work one morning and left Marji loose in the house as usual. But when she got home, Debbie sensed something strange: no greeting at the door.

Worried, she went looking for her dog and discovered chewed-up wrapping paper on the floor and an open gold box. It was the gift their neighbor left - a 1-lb. box of fancy chocolates, and one-half of them were missing. Debbie found Marji standing up in her crate, looking shaky and restless. The poodle had consumed nearly half a pound of rich, mixed chocolates, and the amount she consumed was dangerous. Chocolate contains caffeine and *theobromine* which are methylxanthines and can be toxic. The darker the chocolate, the more of these substances it contains.



We got the panicked call that night and advised Debbie to bring Marji in

immediately. Debbie wasn't sure when the chocolates were eaten, but since Marji was already exhibiting nervous symptoms, we could deduce that the theobromines had already entered the dog's system. We also knew that we would have to get her to vomit any residual chocolate and give her activated charcoal to help prevent absorption of what was in her intestines. We also had to control any seizures, monitor her heart, start IV fluid therapy and observe the poodle for at least 24 hours until the symptoms subsided.

Luckily, we were able to treat Marji in time. She went back to her owners the next evening, and they now stow unknown gifts in a place inaccessible to Marji. Chocolate toxicity is one of the most common poisonings during the holiday season; please be careful what you put under the tree this year.

What to do if your dog eats chocolate:

Call your veterinarian or emergency clinic immediately. Make sure you know the approximate amount of chocolate, the type, and how long ago your pet consumed it. If the chocolate has been ingested within a short period of time, your veterinarian may induce your pet to vomit. The effects of chocolate toxicity may not be apparent right away, but call your veterinarian, regardless.

Methylxanthines in chocolate affect four areas of the pet's body:

- Increase the rate and force of contractions of the heart
- Act as a diuretic, causing the pet to lose body fluids
- Cause vomiting and diarrhea
- Cause convulsions, seizures, and even death