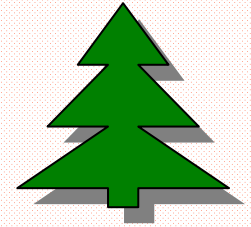


CONTACT US

TEL: 020 7188 0200
FAX: 020 7188 0700
EMAIL: vpis@gstt.nhs.uk
www.vpisuk.co.uk



Christmas Poisons

General seasonal advice for small animal practices

Veterinary Poisons Information Service

020 7188 0200

VPIS ROUGH TREATMENT GUIDE FOR CHOCOLATE POISONING IN DOGS

- **White chocolate** - treatment not required (not enough theobromine)
- **Milk Chocolate** - Treatment for anything over approximately 9g/kg
- **Dark Chocolate** - Treatment for anything over approximately 1g/kg
- **Cocoa powder** - Treatment for anything over approximately 0.77g/kg

CHOCOLATE POISONING

Chocolate poisoning is one of the most common enquiries received by the VPIS, particularly at this time of the year. The severity of poisoning depends principally on two things, obviously the amount of chocolate ingested but also the type of chocolate (i.e. milk or dark). The amount of theobromine (a methylxanthine similar to caffeine) in milk and dark chocolate differs considerably, which is reflected in the toxic dose for dogs (*for approximate treatment doses see "rough treatment guide for chocolate poisoning in dogs" in the box to the left*).

Chocolate is also toxic to other species (for example cats, rodents, rabbits etc) but there is currently insufficient data available to determine a

toxic dose. The foremost clinical effects seen in chocolate poisoning are vomiting and diarrhoea (and coupled with the fact that theobromine is a diuretic, animals may become severely dehydrated). Theobromine also directly stimulates both the myocardium and the CNS, and therefore some animals may become hyperactive and develop hyperthermia, hypertension and often severe tachycardia. Muscular rigidity, tremors and convulsions may also be observed in some extreme cases. Treatment is largely supportive, with particular emphasis on rehydration, reducing



"Chocolate is also toxic to other species, for example cats, rodents and rabbits etc"

the stimulant effects with sedatives, monitoring of vital signs and, since theobromine undergoes enterohepatic recirculation, repeat doses of activated charcoal to enhance elimination and reduce inpatient time - LH

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GRAPES, RAISINS, CURRANTS AND SULTANAS

Fruits of the *Vitis vinifera* (grapes, raisins, currants and sultanas) can, surprisingly, cause renal failure in dogs. Currently the mechanism of action remains unknown, as does the "toxic dose". Some dogs seem able to eat large quantities without any effects, while others develop renal failure after as little as a few grapes or a small handful of raisins. Analysis of VPIS data to explain why some dogs are susceptible

and others are not has so far been fruitless (pun intended - sorry!). The VPIS therefore recommends treatment for any amount.

Some dogs may initially develop vomiting and diarrhoea and develop renal failure from 24 - 72 hours post ingestion. Treatment requires IV fluids at twice the normal maintenance rate to protect the kidneys, and repeat doses of activated charcoal may be

of benefit (the fruits often pass out in the stools so absorption may occur throughout the gut).

The VPIS has received two reports of cats developing renal failure after ingesting raisins. It is possible cats are also susceptible.

Foods to watch out for at Christmas include; Christmas cake, Christmas pudding, Stollen and mince pies - NS

DANGEROUS FOODS

Peanuts (including monkey nuts) have been reported to cause adverse effects in some pets. Most symptomatic animals develop gastrointestinal signs and in a small number of cases twitching, muscle spasm, agitation, hallucinations and occasionally convulsions can occur. Macadamia nuts are also toxic and can cause weakness, tremor, ataxia, vomiting, depression, pyrexia, abdominal tenderness, lameness and stiffness in dogs. Be aware that chocolate-coated peanuts and macadamia nuts are also available.

Allium species (onions, garlic, leeks, shallots, chives) can cause toxicity, even when cooked. Initially there are

gastrointestinal signs followed by haemolytic anaemia from 1-5 days. Christmas foods to avoid are onion gravy and sage and onion stuffing.

Mouldy food (e.g. mouldy walnuts, bread, cheese) can contain toxins that cause rapid onset convulsions with tremors, vomiting, hyperaesthesia and rigidity.

Xylitol, an artificial sweetener, found in some chewing gums and medicinal products can also be bought by the bag load to sweeten home cooking. Unfortunately although healthy for humans it can cause hypoglycaemia and liver failure in dogs - NB



At Christmas remember to watch out for food items that contain

- *Grapes, raisins, currants or sultanas*
- *Chocolate*
- *Peanuts*
- *Macadamia nuts*
- *Onions, garlic, leeks etc*
- *Xylitol (a sweetener)*

If you are a Vet or Veterinary nurse and need further advice on management of a case please call us on our **new number 020 7188 0200**

“POISONOUS” PLANTS AT CHRISTMAS TIME

The Holly and the Ivy
When they are both full grown
Of all the trees that are in the wood
..... Are not as toxic as some....

Well, if cats or dogs decide to eat either of these at Christmas there's probably not too much to worry about. Some sources quote 20 **holly** (*Ilex spp*) berries causing death in a dog – but there's no substantive case data. The **ivy** used in wreaths and decorations is *Hedera helix spp* (not *Rhus radicans* which is “poison ivy”). Both holly and ivy usually only result in drooling, retching or even vomiting. However, ivy can cause muscle twitching, paralysis, convulsions and

death in rabbits. Holly spines may also cause mechanical injury.

Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) - ingestion seems to result in retching, vomiting and salivation but occasionally weakness has been reported. The reports of this plant causing neurological signs probably refer to cases involving the plant the Americans call mistletoe (*Phoradendron spp*).

Poinsettia has a bad reputation, probably as it belongs to the *Euphorbia* family. Although it is reported to be very toxic to cats, the VPIS experience is generally that ingestion only produces gastric irritation.

Ideally veterinary practices should recommend these plants are kept out of reach. With Christmas trees this is obviously impossible! If parts of these are consumed the major risk would appear to be mechanical injury or obstruction from the “needles”.

For all these plants it is recommended that owners keep cats and dogs well hydrated and on a bland diet. If owners report protracted vomiting you might want to bring the animal in and consider giving some maropitant and rehydration therapy.

There are indoor plants that are toxic remember – especially lilies (toxic to cats) - AC



Poinsettia is commonly thought of as being poisonous but is only likely to cause a minor gastric upset

SUBSTANCES OF LOW TOXICITY

All of the items mentioned below are considered to be of low toxicity by acute ingestion. Any ingestion of these substances would be expected to cause a mild gastrointestinal upset, however treatment or observation in a veterinary surgery is unnecessary and cases can usually be managed at home.

Silica gel comes in small sachets and is often found in the packaging for new handbags, shoes or cameras.

Christmas decorations - are usually made of paper, foil or plastics (N.B this does not include decorations that contain batteries). Decorations made of glass

could pose a risk of mechanical damage.

Candles could potentially cause obstruction or a choking hazard.

Wrapping or crepe paper may cause staining of the mouth that can look alarming - KS