Previous Next

Can Cats Eat Chocolate?

When you're enjoying a chocolate snack and your cat's begging for a little nibble, you may find yourself wondering if cats can eat chocolate. Unfortunately, the answer is no. Chocolate can be very harmful to cats, just like it is for dogs.

Chocolate Is Harmful to Cats Because of Theobromine

Theobromine is a stimulant that naturally occurs in the cacao plant, which is used to make chocolate. Theobromine is just fine for people and might actually bring us some health benefits,[1] but it can be toxic to cats. That's because people metabolize it quickly, while cats (and dogs) metabolize the compound much more slowly. This naturally occurring stimulant can then cause several issues with a cat's nervous system.

The darker the chocolate, the more theobromine it likely has. Cocoa powder has the highest concentration of theobromine, followed by unsweetened baker's chocolate, dark chocolate, and finally, milk chocolate.[2] Rather than trying to figure out if a little bit of a certain kind is okay, it's best to stay away from all types of chocolate and not take any chances.

Caffeine, another stimulant found in chocolate, can also cause problems for cats. That makes two good reasons to steer clear of chocolate.

What To Do If Your Cat Eats Chocolate

Several signs can indicate your kitty got into a dangerous amount of chocolate. These include tremors, being hyperactive, stomach upset like vomiting or diarrhea, extreme thirst, breathing fast, or having rigid muscles or seizures.[3]

If you're worried your cat has eaten chocolate, talk to your veterinarian right away. If you can't reach your vet, call the Pet Poison Hotline at 855-213-6680 or the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control hotline at 888-426-4435.

Is Any Type of Chocolate Okay?

There are no exceptions to the chocolate rule. And no, cats can't eat chocolate ice cream either. Not only is the cocoa bad, but other ingredients are harmful to cats as well, like the dairy in ice cream.

Xylitol (an artificial sweetener) is also not good for cats, so steer clear of sugar-free chocolate candies too. Even white chocolate should be avoided. It may not have cocoa, but it has sugar and fat that can make your kitty's stomach upset or cause weight gain.[4]

Alternatives to Chocolate

When your cat's begging you for a nibble of chocolate, why not have something else ready for him to enjoy? Cats can have some ginger along with other safe human foods like eggs, cheese, avocados, fish, or steamed carrots. Keep everything in moderation, of course.

Another option is to time your chocolate break so that it overlaps with your cat's meal. Give your kitty something extra tasty like AvoDerm's Salmon with Tuna dry food or Sardine, Shrimp & Crab Entree in Gravy.

Cats are less likely to want chocolate than dogs since they can't really taste the sweetness. Still, you shouldn't take any chances. Don't leave any chocolate sitting out, and be sure to put it away when you're done. While you're enjoying a chocolate candy, have some treats on hand for your cat so she can enjoy a little snack too.

1. Drahl, Carmen. "What You Need to Know About Theobromine, Poster Child for Valentine's Chocolate Chemistry." Forbes, 14 February [illegible]
2. [illegible]
3. Christopherson, Carla. "Chocolate Toxicity." Cat Life Vet, 2 February, [illegible], 14 March 2021, [illegible]
4. [illegible] 2020, https://www.petmd.com/dog/nutrition/evr_dog_chocolate-and-other-toxic-foods-dogs-and-cats-3385506.

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