

Human Food Hazards



#4 in a Series of Eight

Caffeine

What it's in: Caffeine is most commonly found in coffee, coffee grounds, tea, tea bags, soda, energy drinks, and diet pills. Theobromine ~ a cousin chemical to caffeine ~ is also found in chocolate.

Threat to pets: Pets are more sensitive to the effects of caffeine than people. While a couple laps of coffee, tea, or soda won't poison most pets, the ingestion of moderate amounts of coffee grounds, tea bags, or one to two diet pills can easily be fatal in small animals.

Signs: Within two hours of exposure, pets may experience mild to severe hyperactivity, restlessness, vomiting, tachycardia (elevated heart rate), hypertension (elevated blood pressure), abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, hyperthermia (elevated body temperature), seizures, and could collapse.

Treatment: Induce vomiting and then administer multiple doses of activated charcoal to decontaminate (adsorb and remove toxins). Administer aggressive intravenous fluids to help with excretion, sedatives to calm the pet, specific heart medications to reduce heart rate and blood pressure, anti-convulsants for seizures, and antacids for stomach discomfort and diarrhea. Because caffeine may be reabsorbed across the bladder wall, a urinary catheter or frequent walks are needed to keep the bladder empty.

Prognosis: Excellent in pets with mild signs, such as slight restlessness or a minimally elevated heart rate. Poor in those with severe signs, such as collapsing and seizures.