

Macadamia Nut Toxicosis in Dogs

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BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Macadamia nuts are harvested from Hawaiian *Macadamia integrifolia* and *Macadamia tetraphylla* trees. They are commonly eaten roasted and used in baked goods. The nut is 75% oil.

Causes and Toxicity

The mechanism of action of the toxin is not understood, but ingestion of nuts can result in temporary weakness and tremors of the rear legs in dogs. As little as 1.8 tablespoons of nuts ingested by a 25-pound (12-kg) dog may result in toxicity.

Clinical Signs

Signs are usually seen within 12 hours. Dogs may vomit, act lethargic, be shaky or weak, seem lame, or be unable to rise. Usually, the rear legs are more affected than the forelegs. Often these signs are accompanied by a mild fever (104° F, 40° C). Pancreatitis may arise because of the high fat content in the nuts. Signs usually resolve within 48-72 hours with only supportive treatment.

Diagnostic Tests

There are no specific tests available to confirm macadamia nut poisoning. Diagnosis is based on evidence of exposure and clinical signs. Nut fragments may be found in the vomitus and stool. Laboratory tests, x-rays, and an ultrasound may be recommended

to rule out diseases that can cause similar signs (especially if there is no history of ingestion of the nuts) or to determine whether pancreatitis is developing.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Treatment Options

Induction of vomiting may be recommended if the ingestion was recent and the dog is not showing any clinical signs. Vomiting should be induced only under the direction of a veterinarian. Activated charcoal may be administered to bind the material and prevent its absorption into the body. Most animals recover with minimal or supportive treatment. In some cases, an enema may hasten recovery. In severe cases in which tremors occur, the animal may be hospitalized for intravenous medications and fluid therapy.

Follow-up Care

No long-term effects are expected, as long as severe tremors and pancreatitis do not occur. Laboratory tests may be repeated if pancreatitis is present.

Prognosis

The prognosis is excellent in most cases.