



Geoff and his Rhodesian Ridgeback, Rufus *, were very excited about moving into their new bachelor pad in Sandton. It felt like paradise, what with all the cycads in the garden! When Rufus went off his food, Geoff thought it was probably the strange new environment. Then Rufus vomited and his gums were bleeding. A visit to the vet was definitely in order.

Cycads are commonly used as ornamental plants in gardens in South Africa, but are also indigenous in the subtropics and tropics. Many people are unaware that these plants are potentially poisonous to dogs. All parts of the plants are toxic but the seeds contain the highest concentrations of the poisons, with only 1-2 seeds being able to kill an average sized dog. These plants contain both liver poisons (hepatotoxins) and brain poisons (neurotoxins). In addition to liver damage, the primary liver toxin can induce birth defects in pregnant animals, can cause cancer and has irritant effects on the stomach and intestine. Nervous symptoms induced by the neurotoxin are less commonly encountered.

Symptoms of Cycad Poisoning In Dogs

Common clinical symptoms observed following a dog eating the plant include vomiting, diarrhoea (with or without blood), excessive drooling (hypersalivation), abdominal pain, off food (anorexia), fluid filled belly (ascites) and haemorrhages (gums, conjunctiva). Blood samples collected from affected dogs and submitted to the laboratory for analysis usually reveal liver damage, kidney damage and low blood platelet counts.

Treatment

If you suspect cycad poisoning, take your dog immediately to your veterinarian who will perform a liver function and kidney test and determine what kind of liver and kidney support is needed.