



## Holiday Safety for Pets

The holidays can be a joyous, magical time for families, but they are stressful and full of hazards for dogs and cats. Here are some of the things you need to know to enjoy safe holidays with your pets.

### *Hustle and Bustle*

Holiday shopping, meals, decorating, guests, and festivities mean changes in routine for our pets. We may be gone more, come and go at odd times, feed our pets' meals at different times, and give them less attention and time. Guests may mean strangers in the house, more noise and confusion, children who don't know how to pet gently, and doors left open. All of these things add up to stress, and can make our pets feel insecure.

Try to keep a consistent schedule, and set aside time to play and relax with your pet. Changes in diet can cause gastrointestinal problems, so feed your pets their regular food, and ask guests not to give your pets treats. (See below for more

about foods that can be hazardous to pets.) Supervise children closely, and protect your pet from rough or scary handling — it's not fair to him or the children if he thinks he has to bite or scratch to get away. Many pets have been lost when guests left doors open. Keep ID tags on your pet. Give your pet a safe place to escape and rest during all the merriment; a comfy crate in a quiet bedroom is ideal.

### *Decorations*

Many Christmas trees have been tipped over by playful canines or climbing kitties. If you have a Christmas tree, make certain that it's in a sturdy stand. Anchor it to the wall and/or ceiling with a piece of heavy fishing line. Don't put preservative in the water, and keep your pet's water dish full, so he won't drink the tree water.

Christmas tree lights can cause cuts and electrocution. Keep the cord out of reach, run it through a piece of PVC pipe, and/or cover it to prevent your pet from chewing on it.

It's astonishing how many dogs have crunched up and eaten those pretty glass balls, metal hooks and all! Keep fragile ornaments put away or hang them on high branches.

Avoid edible ornaments, such as cookies, candy, strings of popcorn or cranberries. They're too tempting! Dogs have died from salt toxicity after eating salt-dough ornaments.

Do not use tinsel. Be very careful with ribbon and string. Pets often eat them, causing the stomach and intestines to become kinked and blocked. These dangerous "linear foreign bodies" can even cut through the intestines and cause a life-threatening infection.

Use non-breakable, non-toxic decorations, and hang them with short pieces of ribbon instead of metal hooks. Supervise your pet around the tree. Use a barrier (such as a baby gate) or close the door to keep him away from the tree when you can't watch him.

Avoid angel hair. It's actually spun glass, and is very sharp. It can cut your pet and cause gastrointestinal damage and obstructions.

Be careful with candles! Cats and happy wagging tails can knock them over, causing fires and burns from flames and hot wax.

Liquid potpourris make the house smell fabulous, but they contain essential oils and other ingredients that can burn your dog or cat's mouth and throat.



## Eat, Drink & Be Wary

Holiday cooking and celebrations mean lots of delicious things for us to eat, but many of these foods can cause trouble for our pets. Every holiday season, veterinarians treat many pets for problems caused by things they've eaten.

**Bones** from turkeys, ham, and ribs can cause choking and obstructions, and can perforate your pet's intestines. Don't give them to him, and make sure the turkey carcass is put away safely.

**Rich, greasy, fatty, and spicy foods** can upset your pet's tummy, causing vomiting and diarrhea. They can also cause pancreatitis, which is extremely painful and can be fatal. Don't give your pet greasy table scraps, turkey skin, meat fat or gravy! Make sure the buttery cookie dough is out of reach! Large dogs have died from stealing a cube of butter.

**Overeating or gulping down food and water followed by vigorous activity** can cause bloat. The stomach fills with fluid and gas and rotates in position. This painful, deadly condition is more common in large breeds, but it happens in small

dogs, too. Don't feed your dog when he's excited, and avoid exercise and vigorous play after meals.

Never give your pet **alcoholic beverages!** He can be poisoned by even a small amount of alcohol. 1 tablespoon of whiskey can kill a cat, and 1 oz of 20-40 proof alcohol can put a small dog into a coma. Signs of alcohol poisoning include vomiting, diarrhea, disorientation, difficulty breathing, seizures, coma, and death. Rum-spiked eggnog is delicious, but it can be lethal to your pet!

**Bread dough** is dangerous for your pet, even in small amounts. It rises in the stomach, causing severe pain. The yeast produces alcohol, leading to alcohol poisoning. Surgery is often necessary to remove the dough.

**Chocolate** contains theobromine and caffeine, both of which are toxic to pets. Darker chocolate is higher in these substances than milk chocolate. 1 oz of dark chocolate or less than 1-1/2 oz of cocoa powder can kill a 25 lb. dog.

**Coffee** (grounds, beans, chocolate-covered espresso beans) causes restlessness, tremors, increased heart rate, and seizures.

**Macadamia nuts** (even small amounts) cause muscle weakness and stiffness, depression, vomiting, disorientation, tremors, and abdominal pain in dogs.

**Onions** (including dried onions and onion powder) can be lethal to dogs. They cause Heinz-body anemia, in which red blood cells are destroyed.

**Grapes and raisins** cause kidney failure in dogs. Even small amounts can be lethal.

**Moldy or spoiled foods** cause serious and sometimes life-threatening problems, including seizures, gastroenteritis, and death. Throw garbage safely away in secure garbage cans.

**Nicotine** is poisonous to pets! 1 cigarette or 1/5 of a cigar can kill a dog or cat. Keep ashtrays out of reach!

## Poisonous Plants

Many plants that are used as holiday decorations are toxic to pets.

Some popular holiday plants can be lethal:

Mistletoe

Amaryllis bulbs

Lilies

Some holiday plants are not as hazardous, but they can still cause discomfort:

Poinsettias

Holly

Christmas cactus

## Healthy, Safe Gifts

Don't leave edible gifts under the Christmas tree!

String, ribbons and wrapping paper can cause serious intestinal problems!

Batteries are corrosive, and can cause ulcerations of the mouth and digestive tract.

There are some great toys on the market now for pets. Some of our favorites include Kongs and Buster Cubes. Make certain that toys are non-toxic and difficult to break, and that squeakers and bells can't come out.

## Holiday Traveling

Shelters & rescue groups are especially busy during the holidays. Many dogs are lost while traveling. Others are left home while their families travel. It's very common for dogs to escape and go looking for the people they love.

Don't leave your dog outside in a strange yard! Put him in his crate or an escape-proof room if you go out. Tell the pet sitter not to leave him outside unsupervised.

Give him a special ID tag that says you're traveling. Include your cell phone number and a friend or relative's number in case you can't be reached. Put masking tape around his collar with the phone/address of where you're staying.

### Resources

Veterinary Technician, November, 2003

ASPCA Poison Control Center, [www.aspc.org](http://www.aspc.org)

VSPN Notebook, [www.vin.com](http://www.vin.com)

Veterinary Medicine, Toxicology Brief, March 2004

Animal Wellness, vol 5 issue 6, November 2003

Bark, Winter, 2003

[www.cfainc.org/articles/holiday-hazards.html](http://www.cfainc.org/articles/holiday-hazards.html)

[www.healthy-dogs.net/christmashazards.htm](http://www.healthy-dogs.net/christmashazards.htm)

[www.chicagolandtails.com/index.pl/holiday\\_safety\\_for\\_pets](http://www.chicagolandtails.com/index.pl/holiday_safety_for_pets)

<http://petcare.umn.edu/FAQ/Toxicology/Alcohol.htm>

[www.akc.org/life/family/vac\\_hols/holiday\\_safety.cfm](http://www.akc.org/life/family/vac_hols/holiday_safety.cfm)

[www.bellaonline.com/articles/art7323.asp](http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art7323.asp)

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