

# TO YOUR *Pet's* Health

## Holiday HAZARDS



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The holidays, one of my personal favorite times of year - the decorations, the food, time spent with family and friends. Although this year's celebrations may look a little different for most of us, the holidays can still be a dangerous time of year for our pets. Here are some hazards to think about and tips on avoiding them.

Let us begin with the decorations: trees, lights, tinsel, ornaments, candles and potpourri, special holiday plants. All of these help us liven our homes to celebrate the holidays. However, each can present its own risk to our pets.

-The Christmas tree itself screams out "climb me," especially to young and active cats. A certain amount of training will be involved in trying to keep your pet away from the tree. Try to set the tree in a corner or figure out a way to help prevent the tree from falling over. Also putting a fence around the tree might discourage the dogs from getting too close.

-Lights and cords are especially interesting to young animals, which present risk of burn or electrocution if bitten into. As much as possible try to hide the cords and place the lights on higher branches of the tree to help keep them out of reach.

-If you have a cat or young puppy, consider leaving that shiny, hard to resist playing with, tinsel off your tree. Tinsel is especially hard on the digestive tract if swallowed. It easily balls up in the stomach or can cut through the intestines as it travels through.

-Ornaments become a problem if your pet tries to chew on them, or if they are knocked off the tree and break. Glass ornaments can become sharp shards that will cut a pet's mouth or paws.

-Burning candles are always a hazard to have around pets. Curious animals will often sniff at them, which could cause burns. Your pet could accidentally knock the candle over or move it close to something that might catch on fire. Liquid potpourri is another concern, as curious pets may sniff or ingest the liquid. This can cause burns or, if swallowed, have severe consequences to the mouth, esophagus and stomach.

-Always be aware of the possible dangers your house plants can pose. Some special plants around the holidays to be aware of that are particularly dangerous if ingested are mistletoe, holly, lilies, and amaryllis. Surprisingly, Poinsettias and Christmas cacti are not dangerous in small amounts, but it is always a good idea to try to keep plants where your pets cannot reach them.

Some holiday foods to think about and avoid are:

-Chocolate can cause severe GI upset and sometimes neurologic signs if enough of it is ingested.

-Grapes and raisins are extremely toxic to your pet's kidneys.

-Macadamia nuts can cause neurologic signs.

-Xylitol is a sugar substitute that is being used more and more in sugar-free gums, candies and even used for baking. Double check anything deemed sugar free, even some peanut butters, to make sure that xylitol is not an ingredient. Avoid baking with xylitol in your household or make double sure that your pet cannot encounter the container where it is stored or any baked goods it is made with. Xylitol is very potent, and it only takes a small amount to cause extremely low blood sugar very quickly in your pet. It can also cause liver damage.

-Spices like nutmeg and cinnamon can be dangerous if a large enough quantity is ingested. Also, onions and garlic can cause damage to red blood cells with subsequent anemia.

-Bread dough is something to avoid giving your pet. As it is digested and ferments in the pet's stomach it can produce carbon dioxide that could cause the stomach to bloat, and ethanol that could cause alcohol poisoning.

-It is always a good idea to avoid giving your pet bones. Cooked bones can splinter and cause blockages or irritation as they travel through the intestinal tract. So, throw those bones away!

-Another suggestion is to avoid feeding your pet any holiday leftovers. A lot of our holiday foods are rich in fats and dairy that can cause GI upset. Fatty foods can cause pancreatitis, which is extremely painful for the pet and can make them very ill.

One last holiday hazard we don't often think about are our house guests. Whether they are just staying a few hours or a few days, many guests do not think of some of the hazards they may be carrying around in their suitcases or purses. Medications, whether prescription or over the counter, and sugar free chewing gums or candy are just a few. Always try to have a special place that guests can put their personal belongings that your pet will be unable to get to.

The holiday season is such a fun and exciting time of year. By being aware of some of the hazards and ways to avoid them, it can also be a safe time of year for your pets. Happy Holidays!



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