

Holiday Safety Tips for Pet Owners

During times of celebration, friends and family often gather in our homes. At these times, it is easy to overlook potential hazards to your pets' health and safety. In order to prevent mishaps for your cuddly companions, it is important that you recognize these hidden dangers.

My pets really seem to enjoy opening presents and playing with decorations. Is this okay?

Many dogs enjoy sniffing out boxes filled with tasty treats, and even items made with leather such as clothing or sports equipment. Many of these items can cause an intestinal obstruction if eaten. Even the wrapping paper can cause an intestinal obstruction if eaten, especially if it is made of foil or other indigestible material. Other gifts or stocking stuffers can be toxic for dogs certain types of paint and chemicals can be extremely hazardous to dogs and can cause death if eaten.



Ribbons and strings used to wrap gifts can be hazardous, especially to young puppies and cats who delight in playing with and eventually chewing and swallowing these items. They can become tangled up in the intestinal tract and as the intestines attempt to move this mass of foreign material (called a linear foreign body due to its shape), the rough or abrasive material rubs against the walls of the intestine, causing inflammation and damage with each intestinal contraction. An intestinal obstruction is a life-threatening emergency requiring surgery for correction.

Do I have to worry about my dog playing in the Christmas tree?

Our adventurous pets can bring down a tree, so make sure it is set up securely and cannot fall if your dog/cat decides to climb on board! Keep ornaments above tail height if you want them to stay on the tree! Tree water can contain harmful fertilizers and/or be a breeding ground for bacteria that can cause stomach upset should they decide to sample this new water bowl. Be sure to block off access to the tree's watering dish.



I love the glow of candles during the holidays- do I need to worry about these?

As always, candles should never be left unattended, since pets can knock them over with a wag of their tail or burn themselves. Consider using battery-powered candles instead.

My dog likes to chew on cords. Can this be harmful?

Dangling cords of various types are tempting to pets that like to play with string, as well as young puppies and kittens that are teething, and are chewing anything and everything. Both cats and puppies have extremely sharp teeth that can easily pierce the insulation around electric light cords or extension cords. If this happens especially if it is plugged in, it could result in a severe burn to the tongue or an electrical shock that could damage the lungs or heart. This is an emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention.

I've heard that chocolate is toxic to dogs. Is this true?

Many people do not realize that chocolate can be a poison when eaten in large amounts, even to people! Chocolate contains a chemical called theobromine, that has caffeine-like activities. Theobromine is used medicinally as a diuretic, heart stimulant, blood vessel dilator, and a smooth muscle relaxant.

Unsweetened or baking chocolate contains a much higher amount of the potentially toxic theobromine than milk chocolate (approximately 10-20 times the amount on average), but even milk chocolate can be dangerous in large enough amounts or to a small dog. For a dog weighing 22 pounds (10 kg), as little as 2 ounces (about 50 grams), or 2 squares of baking or dark chocolate or 30 ounces (about 0.8 kg) of good quality milk chocolate is toxic. For the average cat, weighing 11 pounds or 5 kg, the toxic amount of milk chocolate is approximately 11 ounces (11 squares), but only 1-2 ounces (1-2 squares) of baking/high quality dark chocolate has the potential to be fatal. An 8 week old kitten or puppy can be poisoned by 1-2 ounces of milk chocolate. Clinical signs of chocolate poisoning include hyperexcitability, nervousness, vomiting and diarrhea. In severe overdoses, the only symptom may be death.



Dogs have a keen sense of smell and will easily find those wrapped boxes of chocolate that are stashed under the tree!



What sort of festive plants are toxic to dogs and cats?

Contrary to popular belief, poinsettia is not specifically toxic, but can still cause intestinal upset. Poinsettia sap can be irritating to the mouth and stomach of the dog/cat that chews on, or eats the leaves or stems of this festive plant.

Some mistletoe species are toxic, causing liver failure or seizures, while other species are only irritating to the intestinal tract if ingested. The fact that there are several types of mistletoe makes it difficult to predict the clinical signs of poisoning with this popular holiday trimming. It is wise to consider mistletoe to be a hazardous substance and keep it out of reach of your pets.

Other seasonal plants that are toxic include daffodils and narcissi, spring bulbs that are commonly 'forced' to bloom during the winter and bring a 'breath of springtime' into our homes. All parts of many plants belonging to the lily family are highly toxic to cats. Because of this risk it is best to prevent your cat or kitten from chewing on peace lilies, christmas lilies, or other plants belonging to this family.

I like to share our special holiday meal with my dog as a treat on special occasions. Is there anything I should avoid?

We all like to include our pets in holiday meals along with the rest of the family but try to keep in mind that sudden rich diet changes are likely to upset your cat or dog's stomach. Vomiting and diarrhea are common medical problems that veterinarians see during any holiday time, and especially between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. If you wish to feed your dog a special treat, give only a small amount of lean meat on top of, or mixed in with his/her regular dinner. If you feed leftovers that contain a lot of fat, your pet's pancreas may become overworked and inflamed. This serious and extremely painful condition is known as pancreatitis. It usually requires hospitalization and intensive medical treatment; left untreated a severe case of pancreatitis can result in death.



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Make sure that any string or packaging that was used during the preparation of roasts or turkeys is safely disposed of in a sealed garbage container that is placed out of reach. Most pets cannot resist the temptation of garbage and will eat string or other indigestible material potentially causing an intestinal obstruction.

If you leave an uncooked loaf of bread to rise on the counter, your dog or cat may be unable to resist eating it. In the warmth of the stomach, the bread can continue to rise and cause a complete obstruction that the dog/cat will be unable to pass. Other food items that are left out during the holiday season can also present risks to our pets. Therefore, you should always make sure that nothing has been inadvertently left within reach. It is also a good idea to keep your pets out of the kitchen during the hustle and bustle of the season. The last thing you want is for them to get underfoot and be burned or otherwise injured.



My pets are nervous around company, how can I help them?

Try to provide a quiet space away from company where they can feel safe but still have access to fresh water as well as some cozy blankets (and a litter box). Make sure to take time to play with him and/or give extra cuddles and stress-relieving walks during the holidays. There are a number of mild calming remedies including Zylkene®, L-theanine (brand name Anxitane®), and Adaptil® (dogs)/Feliway® (cats) that can be used during the holidays to minimize your pets anxiety. Ask your veterinarian for more information and if these would be suitable for your four-legged friend.

By observing a few common sense guidelines, you can share a safe and healthy celebration with your pets and give thanks for the companionship you enjoy with your four-legged family members.

A few Holiday notes from all of us here at Napanee Veterinary Hospital:

If you and your pets have an emergency over the holidays then the emergency/after hours hospitals are there to help you.

- **Kingston Regional Pet Hospital** - 1381 Midland Avenue, Kingston ON K7P 2W5 - (613) 634-5370
- **Quinte Regional Pet Hospital** - 5529 Highway 62 South, Belleville ON K8N 4Z7 - (613) 968-9956
- **Princess Animal Hospital** - 1027 Bayridge Dr, Kingston ON K7P 3B8 - (613) 634-7123

Due to the nature of the holiday season, we ask that you please give us plenty of notice for all food and medication refills. The last date to place an order for pick up before Christmas is December 21. The last date to place an order for pick up before New Years is December 28. The office will be closed December 26th, 27th and Jan 2nd.

