

How to Keep the Holidays Happy for your Pets

Although the fall and winter holiday season may be a favorite time of year for families, it can be a dangerous time for our pets. Holiday visitors, turkey bones, table scraps, candy, decorations and gift wrappings are just some of the dangers that dogs, cats and other pets face this time of year, so pet owners must be proactive to ensure their pet's safety.



Plan on keeping your furry family members indoors and secured in a quiet part of the house during holiday parties and events to prevent accidental escape through doors that are frequently being opened for holiday guests. Pets that are frightened by unknown visitors and noises may also be more likely to bite out of fear.

Remember to keep pets restrained and away from open candle flames used in holiday decorations to prevent burned paws and whiskers! Electrical cords, holiday lights, dangling decorations, and glistening tinsel should be firmly secured to prevent accidental electrocution or intestinal obstruction from chewing or eating these tempting items. Supervise pets that will be present during the unwrapping of gifts because ribbons are inviting toys to dogs and cats. Ribbons and string can cut through your pet's intestinal tract in 24 hours or less if ingested.

Dogs and cats seem to share our sweet tooth and have an uncanny knack for sniffing out holiday treats. Keep **all** candy, especially chocolate, away from pets as it can be toxic and even fatal if ingested. While chocolate is certainly delicious and may even be beneficial for people, chocolate can be deadly to pets. Chocolate contains caffeine and theobromine which affects the heart and nervous system. Dark chocolate and baking chocolate can be even more toxic because they contain higher concentrations of the theobromine. This is equally true if the chocolate is in candy bar form or an ingredient in cake, cookies, puddings or ice cream. Theobromine affects all pets differently depending upon the pet's size, weight, overall health and amount ingested. Signs of chocolate toxicity in pets include hyperactivity, increased heart rate, restlessness and pacing, panting, excessive salivation, muscle tremors, seizures, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive urination and gastrointestinal distress.

Unfortunately, it isn't only chocolate that poses a danger to our pets. "Healthy" foods like granola, trail mix, and even sugar-free treats can harm Fido and Fluffy. Raisins and grapes contain an unknown toxin that can damage your pet's kidneys causing renal failure and death. Macadamia nuts contain a toxin that can attack the nervous system, muscles and intestinal tract. Diet treats such as sugar-free gum and candies that contain xylitol can be fatal if ingested by cats, dogs and ferrets. Candy should be kept out of your pet's reach and young children should be told not to drop or share these goodies with their four-legged friends. Keep leftovers away from pets as well. Poultry bones are notorious for splintering and potentially causing severe intestinal distress, blockage and injury. Rich fatty foods such as gravies can cause vomiting, diarrhea and even pancreatitis.

If your pet becomes sick or injured from eating holiday treats, exploring decorations or running from holiday visitors, take him or her to the emergency room at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson immediately! Our calm and caring doctors and nurses are here for you and your pet, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.