





Christmas Pet Safety Tips


The holidays are a time to eat, drink, decorate and share good times with friends and family. However, the same treats and trimmings considered harmless for humans can be hazardous to your pet's health. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is offering pet owners some helpful hints to keep their pets happy and healthy during the holiday season.


 **Christmas Trees:** Pine needles can get lodged in an animal's esophagus, making it painfully prickly for your pet to swallow. PETCO says that even drinking the water from the Christmas tree base is enough to cause diarrhea, mouth sores, vomiting and loss of appetite.


 **Deck the Halls:** A bunch of mistletoe may tempt a festive kiss, but PETCO warns that eating this holiday greenery could cause a drop in blood pressure, as well as vomiting and swollen throat and mouth tissue. Other holiday foliage, including Holly and Poinsettias, contain toxins that could lead to severe stomach problems, as well as skin, mouth and eye irritation. Worse yet, Yew is extremely toxic, and one mouthful could be deadly.


 **Tinsel and Lights:** A flickering flame and shiny decorations intrigue companion animals. When lighting the menorah, advent wreath or decorative candles, PETCO advises to keep pets in another room where paws and claws can't reach them. With electrical lights, remember to tape exposed electrical cords to walls or floors to ensure no chewing or tripping. Tinsel and wrapping paper may look like fun toys, but they can cause choking, upset stomach or more serious problems.


 **Visions of Sugar Plums:** PETCO knows that cookies and candies are as much about holiday tradition as a snowy street scene; however, some of them can be dangerous to your pets. For example, chocolate contains a chemical known as theobromine, which can be highly toxic to your four-legged friends.


 **Antifreeze Alert:** The onset of winter often means new antifreeze for the family car, which is a substance that can be especially harmful to the family pet. PETCO notes that antifreeze contains ethylene glycol, which causes rapid and permanent kidney damage to your companion animal if ingested in even small amounts.


 **Holiday sweets** with chocolate are not for pets. Depending on the dose ingested, chocolate (bakers, semi sweet, milk and dark) can be potentially poisonous to many animals. In general, the less sweet the chocolate, the more toxic it could be. In fact, unsweetened baking chocolate contains almost seven times more theobromine as milk chocolate. Vomiting, diarrhea, seizures, hyperactivity and increased thirst, urination and heart rate can be seen with the ingestion of as little as 1/4 ounce of baking chocolate by a 10-pound dog.


 **Keep your pet on its normal diet.** Any change of diet, even for one meal, may give your dog or cat severe indigestion and diarrhea. This is particularly true for older animals that have more delicate digestive systems and nutritional requirements.


 **Don't give pets holiday leftovers and keep pets out of the garbage.** Poultry bones can splinter and cause blockages. Greasy, spicy and fatty foods can cause stomach upset; spoiled or moldy foods could cause food poisoning signs, tremors or seizures.


 Alcohol and pets do NOT mix. Place unattended alcoholic drinks where pets cannot reach them. If ingested, the animal could become very sick and weak and may go into a coma, possibly resulting in death from respiratory failure.


 Keep aluminum foil and cellophane candy wrappers away from pets. They can cause vomiting and intestinal blockage.


 Be careful with holiday floral arrangements. Lilies are commonly used and all varieties, including Tiger, Asian, Japanese Show, Stargazer and Casa Blanca can cause kidney failure in cats. Safe alternatives can include artificial flowers made from silk or plastic.


 Common Yuletide plants such as mistletoe and holly berries can be potentially toxic to pets. Should a cat or dog eat mistletoe, they could possibly suffer gastrointestinal upset and cardiovascular problems. Holly can cause vomiting, nausea, diarrhea and lethargy if ingested.


 Poinsettias are considered to be very low in toxicity. However, they could cause mild vomiting or nausea if ingested by your pet. Christmas tree water may contain fertilizers, which if ingested, can cause stomach upset. Stagnant tree water can also act as a breeding ground for bacteria and if ingested a pet could end up with nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.


 If ingested, decorations such as ribbons or tinsel can become lodged in the intestines and cause intestinal obstruction. This is a very common problem, particularly with cats. Consider decorating your tree with ornaments that are relatively less enticing to pets, such as dried non-toxic flowers, wood, fabric or pinecones.

 A Christmas tree should stand on a flat, wide base. You may also want to anchor the tree with fishing line tied to a drapery rod, a ceiling or wall hook. Cats often see trees as excellent climbing posts. Whether your tree is live or artificial, both kinds of needles are indigestible.

 Cover your tree stand tightly with skirting. The water from the tree base can cause mouth sores, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of appetite.

 If you plan to entertain, provide a "safe haven" to which your pets can retreat when they get overly excited and there is a possibility of escape.

 If you are going away for the holidays: make sure pet enclosures are secure, your pets are wearing proper identification, and arrangements have been made for their care.

 While your pet is safe in a loving home, remember those less fortunate. Millions of pets, nationwide, will be homeless this holiday season. Our shelter animals appreciate toys, treats, and especially love and attention as much as yours. So visit and bring your holiday cheer.