

***Ask the Vet:* Holidays are Happy when Pets are Safe**

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During the holidays, pets with bellyaches, vomiting, diarrhea and lethargy always take center stage. Many of these situations can be prevented. The common cause of so many bellyaches relates to what has been eaten. Consider the risk of illness for your pet as you feed or allow others to feed your pet.

Change in the daily pattern of activity also is a major factor for bellyaches in many pets. Prevention of holiday illness makes a wonderful gift for your pet.

Putting extra emphasis on avoiding disease may help all of us to keep our holiday season full of celebrations and to lower our risk for sadness. Use the list that I have prepared to make your own plan for holiday disease prevention.

Gastrointestinal illness

Pancreatitis -- Stress from daily routine change and/or diet change can lead to this painful disease that may involve vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. Feeding pets "people food" is a major cause.

Foreign body obstruction -- Eating nonfood items such as toy parts or bones or flavorful baby bibs.

Fractured teeth and tooth root damage -- Painful trauma requiring costly oral surgery caused by chewing on hard items such as ice cubes, rolled rawhide rings or bones, real bone or hard chew toys.

Food dangers

Chocolate toxicity -- Darker or cooking varieties contain more theobromine, which is toxic to dogs. Symptoms of toxicity are dependent on chocolate type and amount consumed. They include vomiting, diarrhea, heart arrhythmias, tremors, seizures and sometimes death.

Grapes and raisins -- Eating just one or a few may result in acute kidney failure and death in pets.

Decorations

Tinsel, strings and ribbons -- Intestinal obstruction and intestinal laceration risk.

Plants -- All parts, including the pollen of lilies (*Lilium* and *Hermerocallis* genera) may cause fatal acute kidney failure in cats. Mistletoe and holly can be fatal if enough is eaten by pets. Christmas rose, amaryllis and poinsettias cause vomiting and diarrhea when eaten.

Wrapped gifts of food or decorations with food -- Toxicity, foreign body obstruction, vomiting.

Candles/hot wax -- Singed whiskers, skin burns and house fires.

Electrical cords -- Chewing may result in disfiguring burns on mouth involving soft tissue and bone, pulmonary edema or death.

Healthy holiday tips

Avoid changing your pet's diet. Do not feed "people food," fatty or sugary foods. Keep meals on routine schedule and of measured volume. Feeding less volume per meal during stressful times decreases the risk of vomiting and diarrhea.

Do not give bones of any kind, ever.

Changes in household routine and human stress levels affect pets who may respond with uncharacteristic behavior, which includes chewing on items. Show your pets love by keeping their daily routine as unchanged as possible.

Always include exercise in your pet's day. Give each pet a minimum of 10 minutes of your undistracted, focused attention every day.

Keep decorations, especially those with food items, inaccessible.

Label food gifts you give with "Keep away from pets!" on the tag.

Feed pets measured meals each day so that you know if they are eating normally or not.

Before lodging your pets at a kennel or before accepting visiting pets into your home, make sure flea prevention is addressed safely and effectively.

Avoid "hit by car" accidents by keeping your pet secure and monitored while visitors come and go. Open doors are a dangerous hazard ... it happens every year.

Contact your veterinarian with questions that you have about preventing disease in your pet during the holiday season. See your veterinarian as soon as possible when a problem arises; this may result in a simpler and less costly solution.