

PANCREATITIS: WHY DOGS & HOLIDAY TABLE SCRAPS DON'T MIX

It's a common experience for animal lovers: *"We're about to take our first bite of a meal and notice a dog sitting ever-so-politely next to us, possibly drooling, with eyes focused like tractor beams, willing us to share our food. Aww, how cute! We think, and give the pooch a little morsel."*



It's hard to withstand those puppy dog eyes any time of year, and can seem next to impossible at holiday meals during the season of giving. But for the good of our dogs, we need to resist the temptation to feed them table scraps, and so do our guests.

At Sunshine Animal Hospital we see an influx of dogs with gastrointestinal upset after any holiday.

We tend to think food is love for our pets, and that is not always the case. Sudden changes in diet or feeding little scraps of food, particularly when they're not used to getting those types of food, can really create a lot of problems for the gastrointestinal tract.

One common and potentially serious issue is pancreatitis, which causes inflammation of the pancreas, the organ responsible for digestive enzymes and insulin production. Pancreatitis can lead to organ damage, diabetes, or in the worst case scenario, death.

Feeding a high-fat diet or foods your dog is not used to eating increases his risk of developing pancreatitis. Once he has it, treatment focuses on supportive care, such as controlling nausea and vomiting, preventing further dehydration or imbalances in the blood, and feeding a low-fat, nutritious diet.

Never Feed These Foods To Dogs:

- Chocolate
- Onions
- Garlic
- Grapes or raisins
- High-fat foods, like bacon
- Macadamia nuts
- Any foods containing the artificial sweetener, xylitol (ie "Sugar Free candy/Cookies)
- Salty snacks
- Rising bread dough or raw yeast

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Also remember to keep medications, nicotine, marijuana, alcohol, and caffeinated drinks out of reach of pets.

If the pet is experiencing severe signs, he may also have to be hospitalized for a few days, or even longer in serious cases. The challenge is that many of the signs, including vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and abdominal pain, can be seen with other diseases as well.

That's why it's important to go to the veterinarian and get appropriate diagnostics so that it can be diagnosed early and treated quickly to help prevent further complications, such as dehydration or more systemic diseases.

While pancreatitis in cats is not typically caused by changes in diet alone, consuming table scraps or other unusual foods can still cause gastric upset.

Pets can also develop an intolerance for certain foods as they age. We advise feeding quality pet food with little variance and allowing healthy pet treats or even fresh fruits and vegetables but in moderation.

Of course, sticking to a normal diet around the holidays can be complicated by visiting guests. We often treat dogs who weren't fed by their owners; rather, a relative gave them all the trimmings off the turkey or let them finish their plate because they couldn't resist.

To that end, we suggest the following precautions during the holidays:

- Ask guests not to feed your pet table scraps
- Put your pet into a quiet room at meal time
- Leave out a bag of low-calorie pet treats or a small plate of plain vegetables that your guest can offer you pet.
- Keep pets out of garbage bags

“Holidays are all about celebrating family, and pets are a huge part of our family, so we want to celebrate them as well. Setting up some basic ground rules and making your guests aware of what restrictions you have for your pets can make it a safe and happy holiday for everybody.”