

The “howl-days” for your pet!

During the busy holiday season, there are so many things to remember, and many times ensuring the house is safe for your family pet can fall to the wayside. Simple things like a change in schedule, decorations or even a Christmas tree can cause danger for your pets. Did you know that just the change in environment, with the added decorations and slight change in schedule with all the holiday parties, can cause GI upset in your pet or at the very least, additional anxiety?

While we can't always help the go-go mentality this time of year, we can do several things to make sure that we are taking care of our pets. First, make sure that they are getting plenty of exercise! If you can't get them to the park or out for a nice long walk, then think about adding day care a couple of days a week for the holiday season. The added exercise helps dogs to expend some of that additional anxiety through physical activity. It also helps get them good and tired for those evenings you have activities planned for the family or a holiday party with several guests.

Overeating can be deadly for your pet!

As tempting as it is to invite your family pet to the feast, such overindulging can cause pancreatitis and can be fatal! The well-recognized cause of pancreatitis in dogs is the ingestion of an atypical meal containing high levels of fat. The symptoms of pancreatitis in dogs can be rather vague. Most dogs have some combination of poor appetite, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain.

If you want your pet to join in the feast, feed them no more than 1/3 of their meal with lean meat mixed with 2/3 of their regular diet. Don't add in the excess fat and leave out the starchy foods. After being tempted all day with the lip smacking smells wafting in the air all day, they will be plenty happy to get a bite of the meaty turkey!

Beware of toxic holiday plants!

Many plants that we bring into the house for the holidays can pose a risk for our pets. While the Christmas tree is not a hazard in and of itself, the water being accessible to your pet may pose a hazard. Many trees have been grown with pesticides or fertilizers, which can leach into the water. In addition, more tree farms will spray paint the trees to help them maintain that lovely green color, which can also leach into the water.

The poinsettia is a tradition in our household, but did you know that the sap of the poinsettia plant is mildly toxic to both cats and dogs? In addition, my favorite holiday plants, mistletoe and holly, have a much higher toxicity level for pets. Be sure to contact your veterinarian immediately if your cat or dog ingests them.

Gifts for the dogs and cats in our lives!

According to a <http://PetFinder.com> poll, 63 percent of dog owners and 58 percent of people with cats give their pets holiday presents. Furthermore, many will include extended family pets in their gift giving. Dog and cat grandparents are amongst the biggest group to spoil their grand-dogs and kitties with gifts!

How do you know what to give a family or friend's pet for the holidays? To be safe, be sure you give healthy treats free of any wheat or corn, as many animals have allergies to these ingredients.

Also, be sure any consumables are sourced from the US. Colored rawhides are unnatural and unhealthy for your pet. Try to avoid the splashy red and green food colorings! Alternatively, find treats in colorful bags or wrap a big bone yourself at home with holiday ribbons, and keep the treat itself free of harmful chemicals.

Toys are always a hit for any dog. Choose from squeakers, balls, ropes, plush or toys with treat spots. Choose a tougher toy for the rough players and perhaps a plush toy for seniors or young puppies. Balls or interactive toys are great for the active labs and puzzle toys are good for the busy border collies. For the cats in your life, catnip toys are a hit among most, but anything that crunches, crackles or comes with bells will do as well!