

## **Tips for a Happy, Healthy and Safe Holiday Season for Our 4- Legged Family Members**

Everyone at Pope Memorial Frontier Animal Shelter wants the holidays to be a happy time for you and your pet, and not a time for an emergency visit to your veterinarian. The food and decorations that make the holidays so much fun for us can sometimes be hazardous for our pets. We want you to be aware of some of these hazards so that you can plan accordingly and prevent any potential problems. When in doubt, common sense is always a good strategy!

### ***Food-related Items***

Rich, fatty foods like gravy or grease can cause an upset stomach for our pets and even a more serious disorder called pancreatitis, which is inflammation of the pancreas. This illness requires veterinary care and perhaps even hospitalization. Despite how tasty it might smell to them, it's best to prevent our four-legged family members from eating these kinds of fatty foods.

Alcohol is another product that can cause serious harm to our pets. Dogs especially are attracted to it by its sweet smell, especially if in eggnog. Be sure to keep alcoholic beverages out of your pet's reach.

Chocolate, coffee, and tea all contain substances called xanthines which can cause disorders of the nervous system, urinary system and heart muscle. Chocolate, with theobromine, can especially be a problem because many dogs like its flavor. However, it can cause diarrhea, seizures and even death. Unsweetened baking chocolate and dark chocolate are the worst culprits, but all food items of this nature should be placed out of your dog's reach.

Uncooked meat, fish and poultry can contain bacteria such as E. coli and parasites that cause disease. For your own health, as well as your pet's, always wash utensils that have been in contact with raw meat and cook meat thoroughly.

Remember that small bones such as those from fish and poultry can cause severe problems if swallowed. They can easily splinter and cause a laceration (tearing) in the intestinal tract. This would require surgery. It's best to keep these away from your pet. Some better alternatives are rawhides, Kong toys, and other safer chew toys.

Other items to be aware of include grapes and raisins which contain a toxin that can damage kidneys. Keep in mind that dogs have an exceptional sense of smell and juices on plastic or aluminum foil left on countertops can be very tempting. If ingested, plastic or foil wrap or string from roasts can cause choking or intestinal obstruction. To be safe, immediately put away food and any food wrapping material. It's also a good idea to pet-proof your garbage. This prevents any potential mishaps that could lead to an emergency visit to your animal hospital!

### ***Poisonous Plants***

While many of us enjoy decorating with festive holiday plants, it's important to keep them out of reach of our pets. For example, the leaves and berries of Holly plants cause stomach problems and can be potentially fatal to both dogs and cats. Mistletoe can also cause an upset stomach and the Hibiscus plant can cause diarrhea in our four-legged friends. The Poinsettia, while very easily available and commonly used over the holidays, can cause blistering in the

mouth of our pets as well as an upset stomach. When brightening up your home with some of these plants, just remember to keep them out of reach of your pets.

### ***Decorations and Wrappings***

Ribbons, yarn, string, wrapping paper – all of these can cause intestinal obstruction which could require surgery.

Adhesives and glues, which could have an attractive smell to our pets, can also be toxic.

Candles can cause burns and fires. Never leave lighted candles unattended or within reach of your pet.

Keep in mind that the end of a table cloth or a runner hanging off the edge of a table might signify a fun game for your dog or cat, tempting the happy, eager creature to grab it and pull it off the table. Just consider how things look to your four-legged family member before setting up decorations.

### ***Christmas Trees and Gifts under the Tree***

Remember that Christmas trees and gifts under the tree might seem quite inviting to an inquisitive dog or cat. Keep in mind that the gifts you place under the tree might be opened by a curious pet well before the holiday, especially if there's an inviting smell wrapped inside that gift. It's best not to leave gifts like perfumes or after-shave under the tree when your pet is unattended.

The tree itself should be set up in a stand that is very stable. You may want to consider securing your tree to a window or wall with wire or fish line if your pet is especially interested in jumping on it or climbing!

Tree needles can be toxic and can cause mouth and stomach irritation. The water from the tree stand can also be toxic. Cover the water-filled stand with a tree skirt or towel. Be aware of how your pet behaves around the tree and take precautions to prevent mishaps.

Shiny, glittering Christmas ornaments are especially attractive to dogs and cats that may well consider these items a new toy! Place the shiny, breakable ornaments toward the top of the tree, and the larger, less breakable and less intriguing ones at the bottom.

### ***Visitors***

We all know that some pets love visitors and behave very well. Others may be fearful or aggressive. Think about how your pet might react to visitors and be ready to plan accordingly. A quiet room, away from the commotion, with water and food available will help fearful dogs and cats be more comfortable. If you expect a lot of visitors for a longer period of time, another alternative might be asking a friend to keep your pet or using a local boarding facility.

If you are planning on traveling and cannot take your pet, make reservations at your local boarding facility well in advance of your departure. Many facilities fill up quickly over the holidays. A good alternative is hiring a responsible pet sitter and assuring that they become familiar with your home before you leave.

### ***Pet Gifts and Treats***

When choosing a holiday gift for your four-legged family member, be sure it is safe, with no small pieces that could come off and be swallowed. In addition, choose healthy holiday treats and give them in moderation. With all of the festivities, remember to relax and spend some quality time with your pet. You and your pet will both find that that's the best gift of all!

Holidays are a time to be joyful and thankful. Those of us at PMFAS hope your holidays are beautiful and memorable!

(Adapted from and for more information: [www.peteducation.com](http://www.peteducation.com); [www.drsfostersmith.com](http://www.drsfostersmith.com) )