



Holiday Pet Advice

By Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

The change of seasons and the excitement of the holidays can pose significant issues for companion animals. Problems can occur that need to be discussed. Your pets need to be protected and you need to know how to do this.

Many cats and dogs get stressed at the simplest, most minute changes in their environment or routine. So it is important to keep stressors to a minimum. Just the placement of holiday decorations or visiting friends or relatives can result in additional stress on your pet and even result in intestinal upset. Changes in routine can cause issues, so it is important to keep feeding and exercise routines the same. Make sure your pet has a safe place to go when they get stressed. There are a few products on the market, which I personally use in my hospital, that have been of benefit in stressful situations for your dog or cat. Rescue Remedy is a BACH Flower Essence. Flower essences are homeopathic dilutions of flowers, systematized by Dr. Edward Bach, used to address emotional imbalances. It contains *Helianthemum nummularium*, *Clematis vitalba*, *Impatiens glandulifera*, *Prunus cerasifera*, and *Ornithogalum umbellatum*. Rescue Remedy comes in a liquid drop or a spray formulation. Many clients will spray some inside a cat carrier prior to traveling (without the cat inside). A second product is called Stress Away by Vet Classics. It contains Chamomile Flower, Passion

Flower, Thiamine mononitrate, Ginger, L-Tryptophan and Melatonin. Dosage is based on body weight and is given once daily. Finally, a product named ProQuiet is L-Tryptophan, Niacin (vitamin B3), Pyridoxine (vitamin B6), Vitamin B12, Folic Acid, Taurine, Hops, Chamomile, Niacinamide and Ginger. This formula is also given once daily and is based on your pet's body weight.

A number of holiday and other household plants can cause illness and even death to companion animals. This includes poinsettia, holly, mistletoe, Christmas cactus, Christmas rose, hemlock, lilies, amaryllis, castor bean, philodendron, ivy, English holly, Jerusalem cherry and dieffenbachia. Lilies, for example, can cause kidney failure in cats. Hibiscus can cause gastrointestinal upset and diarrhea. Additional plants and their toxicity can easily be found on reputable internet sites, such as the pet poison hotline.

Christmas trees should be secured to the ceiling to prevent them from falling on your pets. Hang tinsel high enough so your dog or cat cannot reach it. Tinsel can cause intestinal obstruction if ingested, particularly in cats. Keep all ornaments out of reach of your pets. Pets can be curious about holiday ornaments. Broken ornaments can kill if ingested, not to mention, cuts on paws, mouth or any part of their body. Electrical cords have the potential to cause electrocution when your pet tries to bite them. Pine needles, if ingested, can puncture the intestinal tract and can result in peritonitis, a severe and potentially life threatening situation.

Make sure you place all your candles on shelves high enough so that pets cannot be tempted to investigate. Potpourri and sachets can be very dangerous resulting in severe illness or even death.

Be careful with gift wrap. The paper, plastic and string can cause intestinal blockage, often resulting in surgery to remove the blockage.

Make sure your pets do not get any "table food." Many holiday foods can be very problematic to your pets. The gravies, bones, fatty skin or drippings can cause severe and serious reactions including pancreatitis. Even onions and onion powder can cause anemia because onions can destabilize and destroy red blood cells. Also remember that chocolate, some baking supplies and alcohol can cause serious medical health issues. When it comes time for dessert, make sure grapes and raisins are avoided as they can cause kidney failure in dogs potentially resulting in hospitalization and death.

Always make sure that you wipe your dog's paws after coming in from bad weather such as snow or sleet. There are a number of salt products on the market to dissolve snow that are pet friendly, but they are expensive. Consequently, most people throw pet "unfriendly" salt down. So, to be careful make sure to wipe down the feet and pads with warm water each time you pet comes in from the outside.

If you suspect that your pet may have ingested something toxic, call your veterinarian. The ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center has a 24 hour emergency hot line that can be reached at 1-888-ANI-HELP.

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