

Pets and People (Week of December 15th)

Holiday Safety Tips

This a favorite time of year for all of us and our pets. There are abundant treats available and lots of food left over after big meals. Additionally, unusual plants and tree decorations abound. Unfortunately, some of these represent unusual hazards that could interfere with the joy we share during the holidays. I have described a few of these in previous articles, however, this time of year I would like to share a more comprehensive list of potential health hazards with you.

- 1. Christmas Trees: The christmas tree water may contain preservatives and fertilizer. If consumed by pets, it will cause an upset stomach. Stagnant water at the base of the tree can also be a breeding ground for bacteria. Consumption could lead to vomiting, diarrhea and nausea. Christmas tree ornaments, ribbons and tinsel can be dangerous because they can cause an obstruction in the intestinal tract if consumed.**
- 2. Holiday Plants: Pets who ingest holly can experience gastric upset. Mistletoe has it's romantic side for us humans and could even cause a harmless heart palpitation under the right circumstances, however, for dogs and cats the cardiovascular problems are not a joke and gastric upset is also a side affect. For cats, all parts of lilies are toxic. Even in small amounts, they can cause life threatening kidney problems. Poinsettia is less toxic than commonly believed, however, ingestion can cause mild stomach upset.**
- 3. Beverages: Holiday beverages containing alcohol can cause vomiting, diarrhea, incoordination, central nervous depression, tremors and even potential coma and death. Carefully monitor the availability of sweet holiday drinks and beverages like egg nog. Coffee can cause agitation, rapid heart rates and vomiting.**

- 4. Chocolate, Macadamia Nuts, Grapes and Raisins:** Chocolate can cause cardiac and neurological symptoms, macadamia nuts cause weakness in the limbs, vomiting, and tremors. Grapes and raisins have been documented as causing acute kidney failure in dogs. These are all foods that appear harmless and therefore could be left out or unattended in the presence of our pets.
- 5. Yeast Dough:** Cookie and cake dough can be attractive edibles to our pets. Uncooked dough can swell in the stomach and cause extreme discomfort, bloat and depression. Sometimes it is necessary to remove the swollen contents surgically.
- 6. Bones:** Poultry bones can splinter and cause damage or blockage in the intestinal tract. This happens less frequently than one might imagine, however, when it does occur it is life threatening. Personally, I do not like to see our pets consume any kind of bones. I have seen large bones slowly chipped away and accumulate to cause large obstructions in the stomach of a patient.
- 7. Fatty Food:** Excessive fat in the diet can cause inflammation of the pancreas. When this occurs, digestive enzymes leak out of the pancreas and into the abdominal cavity. It is an extremely painful and potentially fatal condition. For this reason, I recommend that you very carefully separate any fat from food leftovers that you might be inclined to feed.

The holidays are a period for sharing joy with our families and pets. The above list represents some hazards that could interrupt this happy season. If your pet ingests the above harmful substances, call your veterinarian at once for advice. If not available, Angell Animal Medical Center has an Animal Poison Control Hotline: 877-2-ANGELL. Jacqie and I wish you and your pets a happy and healthy holiday.

