

December is a month of celebration! A time of holidays and laughter, good food and good company, and being thankful for friends and family in our lives as the old year comes to a close. But it's also a month of hazards for our furry family members. In order to keep the holidays fun and relaxing for every family member regardless of species, here are a few things to keep in mind when the 'nog is flowing and the wind is blowing!

Turkey, ham, shortbread, Christmas cake, and other goodies, cooked and uncooked, may be delicious for us, but they're bad for more than just a pet's waistline. Fatty table scraps like meat, stuffing, or well-buttered veggies can cause, at best, an upset tummy and a mess on the rug, and at worst, a painful and potentially life-threatening medical condition called pancreatitis. Chocolate, grapes/raisins, onions, garlic, anything containing a sugar substitute called 'xylitol', and of course alcohol, are all toxic to both dogs and cats. Even small amounts of any of these foods can cause a variety of health problems or even death. As raw dough rises it may lead to abdominal distention and possibly twisting. The result can be lead to cardiovascular compromise, distress, and possibly abdominal surgery.

Holiday plants such as Lilies, Poinsettias, Mistletoe, and Holly can be toxic to your pets. Lilies are especially deadly to cats, causing acute kidney failure. Mistletoe can cause cardiovascular problems generally however, like Poinsettias and Holly, Mistletoe usually leads to the unpleasant gastrointestinal problems such as, vomiting, and diarrhea. Christmas trees can also pose a hazard. Ornaments containing liquid such as snow globes often contain antifreeze, which is toxic if ingested or even if just spilled on a pet's fur. Ribbon or tinsel can be irresistible for cats but if swallowed can tangle intestines into knots, requiring surgery to correct. Another tree hazard is the lights. Puppies and kittens will often chew and play with electrical cords, potentially leading to electrocution or burns. Sharp glass from fallen ornaments or knickknacks can cause a sharp surprise, while open flames from holiday candles can easily singe fur or burn noses.

Even just the stress of the holiday season can get to our pets. Dogs and cats in particular are both creatures of routine, and routine certainly seems to go out the window when the extended family comes to stay! The stress of new faces in the household, with or without new animals, can often lead to behavioral issues such as inappropriate urination and defecation or chewing. New objects in the house bring new scents with them, which can be overwhelming to sensitive noses. This December, make sure that your pet's routine stays as familiar as possible, and offer them a 'safe space' such as a kennel, spare room, or outbuilding to escape to if they begin to feel overwhelmed. This safe space should have a bed or blanket with the pet's scent on it, be away from prying eyes or excited family members, be relatively quiet, and contain food and water. Remind children to give the pet some space, and make sure that visitors aren't slipping Fido some tasty treats under the table. If your pet is really feeling the holiday blues, pheromone products such as Feliway® or Adaptil® can help promote feelings of wellbeing and comfort, while calming medications such as Zylkene® are available for highly stressed individuals.

The team at Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic wishes all of you, your families, and your pets a safe and happy holiday season, a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year! And remember... "If a Christmas tree falls in the house and there's no one to see it...was it still the cat's fault?" www.dcvet.ca



