

Holiday Toxins

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The holidays are stressful enough without having to worry about a potentially poisoned pet. Below is a list of holiday-related decorations, plants and food items that the veterinarians at Peace River Vet Clinic LTD recommend keeping away from pets.

Holiday Ornaments:

When decorating for the season, consider your pets. Holiday decorations such as snow globes or bubble lights may contain poisonous chemicals. If your pet chews on them the liquid inside could be dangerous to their health. Methylene chloride, the chemical in bubble lights, can result in depression, aspiration pneumonia and irritation to the eyes, skin and gastrointestinal tract.

Tinsel:

If you own a cat, forgo the tinsel. What looks like a shiny toy to your cat can prove deadly if ingested. Tinsel does not pose a poisoning risk but can cause severe damage to a cat's intestinal tract if swallowed. Ultimately, cats run the risk of severe injury to, or rupture of their intestines and treatment involves expensive abdominal surgery.

Plants:

Though they have a bad rap, poinsettia plants are only mildly toxic. Far more worrisome are holiday bouquets containing lilies, holly or mistletoe. The ingestion of one to two leaves or flower petals is enough to cause sudden kidney failure in cats. Other yuletide plants such as holly berries and mistletoe can also be toxic to pets and can cause gastrointestinal upset and even heart arrhythmias if ingested.

Alcohol:

Because alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream, it affects pets quickly. Ingestion of alcohol can cause dangerous drops in blood sugar, blood pressure and body temperature. Intoxicated animals can experience seizures and respiratory failure. Additionally, foods such as desserts containing alcohol and unbaked dough that contains yeast should be kept away from pets as they may result in alcohol toxicity, vomiting, disorientation and stomach bloat.

Holiday Foods:

With the holiday season comes a delightful variety of baked goods, chocolate confections and other rich, fattening foods. However, it is not wise (and in some cases is quite dangerous) to share these treats with your pets. Keep your pet on his or her regular diet over the holidays and do not let family and friends sneak in treats. Foods that can present problems:

Foods containing grapes, raisins and currants (such as fruitcakes) can result in kidney failure in dogs. Chocolate and cocoa contain theobromine, a chemical highly toxic to dogs and cats. Ingestion in small amounts can cause vomiting and diarrhea but large amounts can cause seizures and heart arrhythmias. Many sugarless gums and candies contain xylitol, a sweetener which is toxic to dogs. It causes a life-threatening drop in blood sugar and liver failure.

Leftover, fatty meat scraps can produce severe inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis) leading to abdominal pain, vomiting and bloody diarrhea.

Antifreeze:

As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze when ingested by a cat or a tablespoon or two for a dog (depending on their size), can be fatal. Signs of early poisoning include acting drunk or uncoordinated, excessive thirst, and lethargy. While signs may seem to improve after eight to twelve hours, internal damage is actually worsening, and crystals develop in the kidneys resulting in acute kidney failure. Immediate treatment with an antidote is vital.

Liquid Potpourri:

Filling your house with the smell of nutmeg or pine for the holidays may seem inviting—but if you're partial to heating your scented oils in a simmer pot, know that they can cause serious harm to your cat; even a few licks can result in severe chemical burns in the mouth, fever, difficulty breathing, and tremors.

When it comes to the holidays, the best thing a pet owner can do is get educated on common household toxins and pet-proof your home accordingly. If you think your pet has been poisoned, contact your veterinarian with any questions or concerns.

