

## Keep Your Pets Safe This Holiday Season

From Mr. Kitty's stocking on the mantle to themed doggie sweaters and chew toys under the tree, no holiday is complete without our beloved pets. The more meows (and zoomies), the merrier!

As you start decking the halls and crafting your holiday menus and gift lists, remember there are some foods, décor and holiday novelty items that may put your pets at risk. Check out these tips to keep them safe, happy and healthy during all your seasonal festivities.

### Tree Safety

Traditional holiday trees and their trimmings can pose an array of safety and health threats to pets. Here are some common ones to be aware of:

- Tinsel is irresistible to many pets, and if ingested, can cause intestinal blockages. Ditch the traditional silver stuff and look for pet-friendly alternatives.
- Avoid glass and other ornaments that can break. Cats, especially, will be tempted to swat them off the tree, where they can break and cut paws.
- Flocking and artificial snow can be toxic if consumed in large amounts, so it's better to avoid them altogether.
- Place ornaments on the upper parts of the tree, out of reach.
- Tree water often contains chemicals that extend the life of the tree. These chemicals, in addition to any fertilizers, insecticides, bacteria and flame retardants, can make the tree water dish a toxic soup. Cover the tree stand with a tree skirt, aluminum foil or other material to block off access from pets.
- If your pet is partial to chewing pine needles, which can cause intestinal upset, consider a faux tree.
- Anchor your tree with a sturdy base, and perhaps even fishing line attached to eye bolts in ceiling or wall for added stability, to prevent a climbing-and-toppling hazard.
- Don't put gifts under the tree that contain food, as these might be too tempting and sicken a curious (or food-driven) dog.
- Consider using a baby gate to keep pets away from the tree.

### Decorations and Seasonal [Plants](#)

Take care in selecting decorations and plants around your home by keeping the following in mind:

- Poinsettias, pine needles, mistletoe and holly can cause gastrointestinal upset and other problems, and lilies are toxic to cats and can cause kidney failure. Silk and other faux plants make great alternatives.
- Glues and adhesives can be toxic, so keep them out of reach.
- Watch out for yarn, string and ribbons, which are often attractive to pets and can cause intestinal blockages.
- Switch out live candles/flames for LED lights, which add plenty of holiday warmth without the risk of fire or injury.
- Potpourri often contains oils that can be toxic to pets if eaten.
- Chewing on electrical cords can cause harm or even death. Unplug cords when not in use and spray them with anti-chew solutions such as Bitter Apple. Check out pet-proof extension cords as well.

## Food Dangers

Some [pets](#) will go to great lengths to snatch food. In the best cases, this means a holiday dish goes missing; in the worst cases it can mean sickness or even death of a pet. Stay one step ahead of would-be food thieves with these precautions:

- Keep chocolates and other sweets well away from pets – preferably in a cupboard, the fridge or somewhere else that's secure.
- Do not leave food or alcohol unattended; stealthy pets can swipe them in no time and experience harmful effects.
- Avoid bringing home leftovers for pets. Human food – often containing fatty or spicy ingredients or bones – can be hazardous to your pet. Some top offenders include chocolate, coffee, citrus, onions, grapes, nuts, coconut, dairy and yeast dough.
- Being careful doesn't mean you have to leave your pet out of the festivities – there are plenty of store-bought or homemade options for special pet treats. Stock up on those for the holidays so they can join the fun.

## Entertaining

If you're planning to host guests, remember that parties and get-togethers can stress pets out or upset their routine. Here are some ways to keep them safe and calm:

- Give pets a room or space of their own, where they can retreat to if feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Stock it with fresh water, a bed and their favorite toys.
- If celebrating at New Year's, keep loud noises to a minimum.
- Animals sometimes will take advantage of the commotion or act out by getting into cabinets they don't usually disturb, so be sure to secure any medications, which can be extremely dangerous to animals.

Keeping your pets safe this season just takes a little creativity, forethought and a new habit or two. And happily, the pet industry makes all kinds of pet-safe products and novelty items, so keeping the holidays safe for *all* family members should be easier than ever. Happy holidays!

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