

HEALTH NEWS

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# 7 Ways to Protect Your Pet from Holiday Hazards in Your Home

Written by Gigen Mammoser on December 12, 2018

It may be the most wonderful time of the year, but it can also be a dangerous one for your pet. Here's how to help them avoid 7 of the biggest holiday hazards.

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Do you know the best ways to pet-proof your home for the holidays? Getty Images

There are so many things to love about the holiday season: visiting friends and family, putting up decorations, and of course delicious treats.

But, there's one member of your family for whom the season isn't so merry and bright: your pet.



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Friends and relatives visiting can make your animal anxious and stressed out, decorations can injure paws and snouts, and many holiday treats can either be toxic to dogs and cats, or at the very least upset their stomachs when they're eaten.

Healthline spoke with [Dr. Leni Kaplan](#), a companion animal veterinarian with the Cornell University Hospital for Animals, to remind pet owners about seven big dangers the holidays can present for animals and how to avoid them.

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## 1.) Holiday decorations

Tinsel, ornaments, and lights can all be very hazardous to pets.

Metallic and glass ornaments can cause cuts and bleeding. If they're ingested, these items can cause even more severe internal damage, such as gastrointestinal obstruction, which is likely to require surgery.

Lights and candles can lead to burns and electrocution for your pet, as well as become a serious fire danger to your home and family.

“Keep your pet from chewing or ingesting ornaments, holiday lights, electric wires, and ribbons to prevent gastrointestinal obstructions and electrocution. Consider confining your pet's access to rooms with holiday



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## 2.) Turkey, ham, and other rich foods

While not necessarily harmful themselves, an abundance of rich foods and leftovers can lead to weight gain and health problems for pets. Turkey and ham [can be tricky](#).

The addition of spices and other seasoning agents, like onion and garlic (which can be toxic for dogs), make these items risky for your pets.

The skin of turkey in particular can be problematic for dogs and should not be fed to them.

“Do not share your food to avoid unnecessary weight gain in your pet. Have healthy snacks on hand to share including green beans, carrots, zucchini, or celery. Fatty and greasy foods can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, and in some circumstances pancreatitis — a serious illness which may require hospitalization,” said Kaplan.



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## 3.) Medication

More visitors means a greater likelihood that things like medication can be left out somewhere a pet can reach them.

Medication is harmful and potentially fatal for animals to consume. Make



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This also applies to medical cannabis, particularly if it's in edible form which might be more appealing to a pet.

## 4.) Sweets and treats

Many of the sweet items that are eaten frequently during the holidays are potentially toxic for pets. Fruit cakes, nuts, and (for the health-conscious) sugar-free candies all pose the risk of gastrointestinal distress for animals.

And yes, chocolate is most definitely toxic for dogs and cats.

“Restrict access to holiday snacks and treats like chocolate, coffee, caffeine, macadamia nuts, grapes, raisins, and any candy or food item containing xylitol which are toxic to pets and potentially lethal at any time of the year,” said Kaplan.



Many traditional holiday treats are poisonous to pets. Make sure to keep them out of paw's reach. Getty Images

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## 5.) Trees and plants

Christmas trees are generally safe for pets, though pine needles can cause eye trauma. Also, cats specifically should be discouraged from



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Holly (as in that plant we use to ‘deck the halls’) **is toxic** for dogs and cats, as **is mistletoe**. Both can lead to vomiting, diarrhea, and potentially more severe symptoms.

“Examine all bouquets, as some flowers can be toxic to pets. Bear in mind, some visitors may bring bouquets that contain flowers such as lilies, which are toxic to cats,” said Kaplan. “Poinsettias are relatively safe and do not impose a serious hazard to pets, but do avoid access to, or ingestion of, mistletoe and holly.”

## 6.) Potpourri

If you want your house to smell like sugar and spice and everything nice, keep in mind that potpourri is dangerous for animals.

Liquid potpourri contains essential oils and other additives that can harm your pet’s eyes, nose, and mouth.

If ingested, both solid and liquid potpourris can cause gastrointestinal distress.

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## 7.) Alcohol

Whether it’s in eggnog, spiced punch, or another holiday favorite



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Alcohol can lead to many of the same effects that humans experience including vomiting, diarrhea, decreased coordination, and central nervous system depression.

It can also be fatal in large quantities.

## Mental health hazards are problems for pets, too

Your pet's mental health should also be a major consideration during the holidays.

Take their stress level into consideration when hosting guests and consider boarding them, if it's likely to cause anxiety.

Anti-anxiety medications are also available through your veterinarian for some pets.

Creating a special safe space or room for your pet is also a great idea if you expect lots of guests during the holidays.

“Make sure to stick to your pet's normal routine as much as possible to enjoy a low-stress holiday season. Build in time for walks, play, and meals prior to the start of the holiday [celebrations]. Consider how and where to feed your pets — is their normal spot going to be off limits or overcrowded?” said Kaplan.

In a worse-case scenario, being a good pet owner also means knowing when you need to call your veterinarian.

“Contact a veterinarian immediately if you suspect your pet ingested any dangerous foods, items, or if they are not acting right. If traveling, be proactive and find out where and when you can seek veterinary care during the holidays in case you need it,” said Kaplan.

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## The bottom line

The holidays can present new dangers and stresses for pets of all varieties.

Ensure pets are kept away from dangerous decorations, including tinsel, lights, and potpourri, which can cause serious injury.

Keep food well out of reach of pets, as holiday sweets and treats can be toxic for them. Rich foods like turkey and leftovers can cause weight gain and stomach problems for pets, and shouldn't be given to them.

Finally, keep your pet's mental health in mind as guests and visitors can cause a great deal of stress for them. Keep a regular routine with your pet, including walks and feeding time. Consider putting aside a private room or space for your pet where they can relax away from the crowd.



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