

**ACCES for Pet Health**

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**Christmas Pet Hazards to Watch Out For**

**By Dr. Beth Guerra, DVM**



Dr. Beth Guerra with her dog Buddy

The holiday season is upon us, and it is natural to want to include our pets, as they are part of the family. However, even though you may have an appropriate gift set aside, your dog or cat may have other ideas on how to celebrate. These are the most common "holiday hazards" that we see in veterinary medicine.

*Chocolate*

We've already talked about it, but we can't stress enough how important it is to watch out for this delicious-yet dangerous-treat. Chocolate contains a substance, theobromine, which can be toxic to pets. Mild chocolate (as well as chocolate-flavored goodies) tend to have a lower amount of theobromine, while the darker, semisweet, and baking chocolates have higher amounts. Symptoms of toxicity include immediate vomiting and diarrhea, increased heart rate, tremors, or seizures. Your pet may seem hyperactive or even extremely lethargic. If you suspect your pet has gotten into chocolate, contact your veterinarian for advice. Usually, a single Hershey's Kiss is not a problem, but during this season, semisweet and baking chocolate are more prevalent. Treatment is based on the pet's clinical symptoms, as well as the type and amount of chocolate ingested.

*Tinsel and Ribbons*

Cats are often attracted to shiny objects, and will frequently play with tinsel or ribbons from gifts or trees. They are usually swallowed and can cause linear foreign bodies, which can be fatal if surgery is not performed. So, keep ribbon away from kitties and don't

encourage them by waving it around in an attempt to play. Steer clear of tinsel on the tree because even the smallest piece can cause problems. If you see your pet trying to defecate a piece of string, do not pull as it may cause further damage if anchored. If you suspect your cat (or dog) has eaten anything stringy, contact your vet.



Don't tempt your cat with ribbon. It's pretty, but can be very bad for her.

*Toys and Ornaments*

Dogs especially are very adept at snatching toys when owners are not looking. Beware of toys with smaller parts that detach, as these may be ingested and cause intestinal blockage. Be sure to pick up any smaller toys or parts lying around, before they can



Glass ornaments can be dangerous if broken-and expensive to replace. So, keep them out of reach and don't allow

become a hazard. If possible, avoid hanging ornaments low on trees where they can be accessible to pets. Take care with glass ornaments, as they can be knocked off the tree and shatter. If possible, try to avoid metal hooks to hang ornaments as these will often be swallowed.

*Plants*

During the holiday season, mistletoe, poinsettias, and holly are commonplace. Holly and poinsettias usually only cause gastrointestinal irritation if ingested, and are not fatal unless ingested in fairly large amounts. Lilies often appear in holiday bouquets, and are

tempting to cats. Any type of lily can be fatal to cats if ingested. Again, if you suspect your pet has ingested any of these, contact your vet.

The holiday season is always a wonderful time to spend with relatives, friends, and animals alike. As pet owners, however, we do have a certain responsibility to be extra vigilant during this busy time to ensure we are not causing accidental harm to our furry friends. By taking a few extra precautions, we can

pets to use them as toys.

all enjoy ourselves!



Poinsettias are pretty and festive, but can make your pet very sick. Keep them out of reach of curious noses!

Posted by [Christina Ryan](#) at December 22, 2008 12:00 a.m.

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