

# Victoria Road Animal Hospital

222 Victoria Road South, Guelph, ON, N1E 5R1

Phone: 519-763-9990

Fax: 519-763-3756

Email: vrah@sympatico.ca

## Household Hazards – Holiday Safety Tips for Dog Owners

During times of celebration, friends and family often gather in our homes. At these times, it is easy to overlook potential hazards to your dog's health and safety. In order to prevent mishaps for your cuddly companions, it is important that you recognize these hidden dangers.

### My dog really seems to enjoy opening presents and playing with decorations. Is this okay?

Many dogs enjoy sniffing out boxes filled with tasty treats, and even items made with leather such as clothing or sports equipment. Many of these items can cause an intestinal obstruction if eaten. Even the wrapping paper can cause an intestinal obstruction if eaten, especially if it is made of foil or other indigestible material. Paintballs, the paint filled 'ammunition' used in the game of paintball is extremely hazardous to dogs and can cause death if eaten.



Ribbons and strings used to wrap gifts can be hazardous, especially to young puppies who delight in playing with and eventually chewing and swallowing these items, that can become tangled up in the intestinal tract. As the intestines attempt to move this mass of foreign material (called a "linear foreign body" due to its shape) the rough or abrasive material rubs against the walls of the intestine, causing inflammation and damage with each intestinal contraction. An intestinal obstruction is a life-threatening emergency requiring surgery for correction.

**"If you want to let your puppy or dog open gifts or play with the wrappers, only do so while under your direct supervision."**

If you want to let your puppy or dog open gifts or play with the wrappers, only do so while under your direct supervision. Better yet, don't encourage this sort of play!

### My dog likes to chew on cords. Can this be harmful?

Dangling cords of various types are tempting to dogs that like to play with string as well as young puppies that are teething and are chewing anything and everything. Puppies have extremely sharp teeth that can easily pierce the insulation around electric light cords or extension cords. If a pet bites through an electrical cord that is plugged in, it could result in a severe burn to the tongue or an electrical shock that could damage the lungs or heart. This is an emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention.

## I've heard that chocolate is toxic to dogs. Is this true?



Many people do not realize that chocolate can be a poison when eaten in large amounts, even to people! Chocolate contains a chemical called theobromine, that has caffeine-like activities. Theobromine is used medicinally as a diuretic, heart stimulant, blood vessel dilator, and a smooth muscle relaxant. Unsweetened or baking chocolate contains a much higher amount of the potentially toxic theobromine than milk chocolate (approximately 10–20 times the amount on average), but even milk chocolate can be dangerous in large

enough amounts or to a small dog. For a dog weighing 22 pounds (10 kg), as little as 2 ounces (about 50 grams) of baking or dark chocolate or 30 ounces (about 0.8 kg) of good quality milk chocolate is toxic. Clinical signs of chocolate poisoning include hyperexcitability, nervousness, vomiting, diarrhea and death. For further details about the hazards of chocolate, see our handout "Chocolate Poisoning". **Dogs have a keen sense of smell and will easily find those wrapped boxes of chocolate that are stashed under the tree!**

## What sort of festive plants are toxic to dogs?

Poinsettia sap can be irritating to the mouth and stomach of the dog that chews on or eats the leaves or stems of this festive plant. Contrary to popular belief, poinsettia is not specifically toxic, but can cause intestinal upset.

Some mistletoe species are toxic, causing liver failure or seizures, while other species are only irritating to the intestinal tract if ingested. The fact that there are several types of mistletoe makes it difficult to predict the clinical signs of poisoning with this popular holiday trimming. It is wise to consider mistletoe to be a hazardous substance and keep it out of reach of pets and children.

Other seasonal plants that are toxic include daffodils and narcissi, spring bulbs that are commonly 'forced' to bloom during the winter and bring a 'breath of springtime' into our homes.

## I like to share our special meal with my dog as a treat on special occasions. Is there anything I should avoid?

We all like to include our pets in holiday meals along with the rest of the family, but try to keep in mind that sudden rich diet changes are likely to upset a pet's stomach. Vomiting and diarrhea are common medical problems that veterinarians see during any holiday time, and especially between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. If you wish to feed your dog a special treat, give only a small amount of table food on top or mixed in with its regular dinner. If you feed leftovers that contain a lot of fat, the pancreas may become overworked and inflamed. This serious and extremely painful condition is known as pancreatitis. It usually requires hospitalization and intensive medical treatment; left untreated a severe case of pancreatitis can result in death. Also,

make sure that any string or packaging that was used during the preparation of roasts or turkeys is safely disposed of in a sealed garbage container that is placed out of your dog's reach. Most dogs cannot resist the temptation of a strategically placed garbage bag, and eating string or other indigestible material can potentially cause an intestinal obstruction.



If you leave an uncooked loaf of bread to rise on the counter, your dog may be unable to resist eating it. In the warmth of the stomach, the bread can continue to rise and cause a complete obstruction that the dog will be unable to pass. Other food items that are left out during the holiday season can also present risks to your dog. Therefore, you should always make sure that nothing has been inadvertently left within your dog's reach. It is also a good idea to keep your pets out of the kitchen during the hustle and bustle of the season. The last thing you want is for them to get underfoot and be burned or otherwise injured.

By observing a few commonsense guidelines, you can share a safe and healthy celebration with your dog and give thanks for the companionship you enjoy with your four-legged family members.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM*

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