

# CHRISTMAS HAZARDS

## EATING THINGS THEY SHOULDN'T!

There are 4 GOLDEN RULES for any occasions that your pet may have eaten something they shouldn't have

1. Stop your pet from eating anymore!
2. If possible get any packaging with ingredients/ weights etc.
3. **CONTACT THE VETS TO SEE IF ANY FURTHER ACTION IS NECESSARY** – if you know what they have eaten, how much and how long ago and how much your pet weighs then they will be able to give you more accurate advice.
4. Don't worry! With prompt, appropriate treatment it is very rare for any long term or serious complications



## CHOCOLATE

Chocolate contains a chemical, theobromine, very similar to caffeine, which dogs do not tolerate very well.

White chocolate is generally not a risk but even a relatively small amount of dark chocolate can cause agitation, hyperexcitability, tremors, convulsions and problems with the heart.

If there are dogs in the household or visiting over Christmas do not put any chocolate under or on the Christmas tree; the temptation may be too great.

Dogs will obviously not unwrap chocolate and can eat a very large quantity. The wrappers are not toxic but could cause obstruction of the gut.

## GRAPES & RAISINS

Grapes and their dried products (currants, sultanas and raisins) are toxic to dogs. EATING EVEN A SMALL QUANTITY CAN CAUSE SEVERE KIDNEY PROBLEMS.

Don't forget this will include food items that contain dried fruits such as Christmas pudding, Christmas cake and mince pies. Obviously chocolate-

coated raisins are available so there is the additional risk of chocolate toxicity with these (although to be fair the chocolate content is so small the raisins are more of the problem).



## ONIONS LEEKS & GARLIC

Onions, garlic, leeks, shallots and chives all belong to the Allium species of plants and contain an ingredient called thiosulphate which is toxic to cats and dogs. They can cause toxicity even when cooked.

Initially there can be gastrointestinal signs with vomiting and diarrhoea but the main effect is damage to red blood cells resulting in anaemia. This may not be apparent for several days after ingestion.

Along with the vegetables themselves foods at Christmas to avoid include sage and onion stuffing.

## LEFTOVERS

At Christmas there are always a lot of leftovers and common sense tells us not to feed these to our pets. We must also be careful of how we dispose of them - overflowing bins and food caddies are easy pickings for pets. Mouldy food (including yoghurt, bread and cheese) can contain toxins produced by the mould that cause serious problems including rapid onset convulsions in dogs. We do see a number of cases of this throughout the year and with altered bin collections over Christmas the risk is increased.



With plenty of spare turkey there is always a temptation to give our pets a treat (or for them to help themselves!). Whilst bones are part of a wild dogs diet these are in the uncooked state and cooked turkey bones can be quite brittle and splinter into sharp spikes which can easily get stuck. They are also a lot harder to spot on xrays, probably due to the low calcium content of intensively reared birds.

So if you are wanting to give your pet a festive treat just stay away from the bones

## BATTERIES

If your dog chews a battery they are at risk of suffering caustic burns to their mouth, throat or stomach from the caustic material contained within the battery. These burns can result in pain, refusal of food, increased drooling, bad breath, and they can become infected too.



An ingested battery can also obstruct the normal passage of food through the digestive tract leading to vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and a refusal to eat.

If your pet has ingested a battery...

It is very important that you **do NOT induce vomiting** in a pet that has ingested a battery, and there are very important reasons why:

1. Caustic material can cause further damage when vomiting
2. Caustic material could gain entry to the lungs when vomiting
3. Common 'at home' methods of making a pet vomit can cause further irritation and damage

If your pet eats a battery, the best first step is to ring the vet for advice. If it is going to be a long while before you can get to the vet you can feed them bland food (boiled chicken and rice, plain cooked pasta) and offer some milk or water - feeding a mixture of cottage cheese and rice can cover both bases at once but they do need to be seen by the vet.

The one advantage of batteries is that they will always show up on an xray so we can be certain that they are there and need removing.

Although you can likely find a few stories on the Internet of pets who passed batteries without incident, in the vast majority of cases pets do far better when such foreign bodies are surgically removed.



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### SILICA GEL

This comes in small sachets and is often found in the packaging of new shoes, handbags, cameras or electrical equipment. Although it is labelled "Do not Eat" it is considered to be of low toxicity and should not cause any specific problems unless swallowed whole by a small dog/ puppy where

physical obstruction is potentially possible but unlikely



## ALCOHOL & HANGOVER CURES

Dogs may help themselves to any alcohol left unattended including wine and liqueurs and it can cause similar signs in them as it does in their owners when drunk in excess (although they are unlikely to start singing and dancing!). Dogs can become wobbly and drowsy and in severe cases there is a risk of low body temperature, low blood sugar and coma.



Many households will have numerous types of anti-inflammatories that are available over the counter or in common flu and cold treatments. The easy availability of these medicines leads us to think they are very safe but for our pets this may not be the case. It is very important to keep these medicines out of reach of pets with lids securely fastened. If you keep some in your handbag make sure that's out of the way too.

**Ibuprofen** – dogs are very sensitive to the effects of ibuprofen. It can cause a variety of effects on the gut and kidneys and poisoning can show with signs such as vomiting, diarrhoea, lethargy, weakness, tremors and convulsions. Long term effects include kidney failure.

**Paracetamol** - Paracetamol is a commonly available painkiller. It is used in dogs but in overdose it can have toxic effects on the blood and liver. Cats are very sensitive to paracetamol.



## PONSETTIAS AND OTHER PLANTS

Despite Poinsettias being a firm favourite at Christmas they have quite a reputation for being poisonous. This reputation is somewhat undeserved as it is not particularly toxic to either humans or animals. . It can cause irritation to the mouth and stomach with hypersalivation and sometimes vomiting.

In fact, most of the traditional Christmas plants aren't particularly poisonous. Holly leaves can cause obvious physical problems with the spiky leaves and the berries mild gastrointestinal upsets. The same applies for mistletoe – European mistletoe only causes gastrointestinal upsets.

Prolonged contact with ivy can cause skin irritation but again only mild gastrointestinal upsets if eaten.

Many households will have **lilies** at Christmas, and all parts of this plant including the pollen, are extremely toxic to cats (but not dogs) and cause severe kidney damage. If you have any suspicion that your cat may have eaten (or licked pollen from its coat) you should contact us immediately.



## OVERINDULGENCE

We all like to overindulge at Christmas but it is important we don't get too carried away when it comes to feeding our pets. Any sudden change in diet can cause diarrhoea which, while it is not too serious, isn't probably what we want to be dealing with at Christmas.

A large intake of fatty foods however can cause more serious problems as it may trigger a condition called pancreatitis. This is a painful inflammation of the

pancreas which causes vomiting and anorexia and often needs lengthy hospitalisation.

All in all it is probably best if you want your pet to join you for Christmas dinner to stick to a few bits of lean turkey breast with their normal diet.