

# Holiday Toxins

by  
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Serious accidents involving pets are always tragic, but especially so at holiday time. Every holiday season we see several pets seriously injured or poisoned due to avoidable hazards.

## **AVOID *Holiday Food Items That Could Cause Problems For Your Pet***

- Alcoholic beverages
- Chocolate (baker's, semi-sweet, milk chocolate)
- Coffee (grounds, beans, chocolate covered espresso beans)
- Moldy or spoiled foods
- Onions, onion powder
- Fatty foods
- Salt
- Yeast dough

## **PLANTS**

- **Lilies** that may be found in holiday flower arrangements could be deadly to your cat. Many types of lily, such as Tiger, Asian, Japanese Show, Easter, Stargazer, and the Casa Blanca, can cause kidney failure in cats.
- **Poinsettias** are generally over-rated in toxicity. If ingested, poinsettias can be irritating to the mouth and stomach, and may cause mild vomiting or nausea.
- **Mistletoe** has the potential to cause cardiovascular problems. However, mistletoe ingestion usually only causes gastrointestinal upset.
- **Holly** ingestion could cause vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, and lethargy.

## **HAZARDS AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE**

- **Christmas tree water** may contain fertilizers, which, if ingested, can cause stomach upset. Stagnant tree water can be breeding grounds for bacteria, which can also lead to vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea, if ingested.
- **Electric cords.** Avoid animal exposure to electric cords. If they were chewed, they could electrocute your pet. Cover up or hide electric cords, never let your pet chew on them.
- **Ribbons or tinsel** can get caught up in the intestines and cause intestinal obstruction. This requires immediate surgery, and is life-threatening.
- **Batteries** contain corrosives. If ingested they can cause ulceration to the mouth, tongue, and the rest of the gastrointestinal tract.
- **Glass ornaments** can cut the tissues of the gastrointestinal tract if ingested.

## **MEDICATIONS**

Remind holiday guests to store their medications safely. Leaving pill vials unattended on a night stand can be dangerous. Keep all prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs out of the reach of your pets, preferably in closed cabinets. Pain killers, cold medicines, antidepressants, vitamins, and diet pills are common examples of human medication that could be potentially lethal even in small dosages.

During the holidays, many veterinary clinics have limited office hours. In some cases, pet owners try to medicate their animals without their veterinarian's advice. **Never** give your animal any medications unless under the directions of veterinarian. Many medications that are used safely in humans can be deadly when used inappropriately. Less than one regular strength acetaminophen tablet (325mg) can be fatal to a cat. A single ibuprofen tablet can cause potentially life-threatening intestinal ulcers in dogs.

## OTHER WINTER HAZARDS

- **Antifreeze** has a pleasant taste. Unfortunately, the chemical responsible for this taste, ethylene glycol, in even very small amounts can be lethal. As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze can be deadly to a cat; less than four teaspoons can be fatal to a 10-pound dog. Any antifreeze ingestion must be considered extremely dangerous. Thoroughly clean up any spills, store antifreeze in tightly closed containers and store in secured cabinets. Automotive products such as gasoline, oil and antifreeze should be stored in areas that are inaccessible to your pets. Low Tox™ brand antifreeze contains propylene glycol and is recommended to use in pet households. Propylene glycol is a safer form of antifreeze.
- *If you think your pet has consumed antifreeze, contact your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-4-ANI-HELP) right away!*
- **Liquid potpourris** are popular household fragrances commonly used during the holiday season. Pets are often exposed to liquid potpourri by direct ingestion from simmer pots or spills, or by rubbing against leaky bottles or simmer pots containing the potpourri, or from spilling the containers upon themselves. Oral exposures result following grooming. Exposure of pets to some types of liquid potpourris can result in severe oral, dermal and ocular damage.
- If you travel to the snow this winter remember that **ice-melting products** can be irritating to skin and mouth. Depending on the actual ingredient of the ice melt and the quantity, signs of ingestion would include excessive drooling, depression, vomiting or even chemical imbalances in the blood.
- **Rat and mouse killers** are used more commonly during colder weather. When using rat and mouse bait, place the products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals.

## ALWAYS Be Prepared !!!!

Your animal may become poisoned in spite of your best efforts to prevent it. You should keep telephone numbers for your veterinarian, a local emergency veterinary service, and the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (**1-888-4 ANI-HELP**) in a convenient location. If you suspect that your pet has ingested something poisonous, seek medical attention immediately.

## ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, an operating division of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) is a unique, emergency hotline providing 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week telephone assistance to veterinarians and pet owners. The Center's hotline veterinarians can quickly answer questions about toxic substances found in our everyday surroundings that can be dangerous to animals. The Center maintains a wide collection of reference materials and computer databases that help provide toxicological information for various species. Veterinary professionals provide around-the-clock, on-site coverage of the Center. The phone number of the Center is 1-888-4-ANI-HELP (1-888-426-4435) and the website is [www.apcc.aspc.org](http://www.apcc.aspc.org).