

Thanksgiving is this month, and the rest of the holiday season is just around the corner. It's a crazy time for many families, but you need to make sure the blur of activity doesn't cloud your vision to the point where you ignore some of the holiday dangers to your pets.

Every year at this time we start seeing dogs and cats affected by common holiday hazards like feeding problems and the ingestion of foreign objects. Unfortunately, many pets will end up at the veterinarian's office this holiday season. However, fortunately for you, these hazards are as easily avoidable as they are dangerous.

First, avoid problems with new foods being fed. Examples of potential problems are a big piece of turkey skin or other fatty trimmings, or a few slices of spicy lunch meat.

Foods like these, which are too fatty or too spicy can cause intestinal problems like vomiting and diarrhea, and some fatty foods can lead to the development of "Pancreatitis"—a serious and potentially life-threatening inflammation of the pancreas. This painful abdominal condition can require IV fluids and an expensive hospital stay of several days.

My general advice is to avoid giving anything to your pet that you wouldn't also eat. While small amounts of lean meat won't hurt, avoid the fatty parts. This includes the poultry skin, which contains high amounts of fat.

Second, beware of poultry bones or the string used to wrap a roast. In medical terms, anything like this that is swallowed that does not normally belong in the digestive system is referred to as a "foreign body". Ingestion of a foreign body like these can result in a blockage of the intestines, and require surgery to remove.

Bones that splinter—like poultry bones—can puncture the intestines and lead to a life-threatening infection of the abdominal cavity called "Peritonitis." (Broth is a wonderful treat poured over your pet's regular food.)

String, like that which wraps a roast, can become lodged in the intestines, virtually twisting the intestines into a knot. This causes extreme pain, and requires surgery. Even with prompt attention, the intestines can become lacerated where the string is rubbing on the inner surface. This is life-threatening. And very expensive.

What treats do I think are safe for dogs and cats? Generally, pieces of lean meat are fine. Vegetables, either raw or cooked, are safe. And pasta and bread—including turkey stuffing—are fine, provided the stuffing does not have a lot of poultry fat mixed into it. Broth (again, with minimal fat in it) can be poured over your pet's food as a tasty addition. However, bear in mind that any food that your pet is not accustomed to can still cause digestive upset, so in addition to practicing prudent proportions for people, the same "moderation in all things" applies to your pets.

Be thankful this holiday season for the pets that you have, and the unconditional love they give you. Show them just as much love by helping them steer clear of these serious by easily avoidable problems.