

This is the first holiday season that we have a dog in the family. Anything I should know about keeping him safe during the holidays?

The holiday season can be busy, joyous, and stressful for the people and pets in your family. You will need to do what you can to prevent dangerous situations. Curious pets will investigate decorations by sniffing, chewing, and pawing or pulling at them. Electrical cords and twinkling lights can electrocute your pet causing burns to the mouth, fluid in the lungs or even death. Ingestion of tinsel, light bulbs or ornaments can cause trauma to the mouth and digestive tract. Plants such as poinsettia and mistletoe should not be in an area that your pets can reach. Decorative candles can be knocked over causing a house fire. Perfumed candles or air fresheners can cause respiratory irritation or be poisonous if ingested. If you must have holiday decorations that are potentially dangerous to your pets, use baby gates, indoor fencing, or closed doors to prevent your pet's access to them.

Your dog will also need extra consideration during holiday parties and gatherings. Some pets are frightened by large groups of people. They can get underfoot and stepped on, or they may snap or bite if guests startle them or behave in ways that your pet finds unusual. House guests may not know your pet's routine or behavior, allowing your pet to escape from the house or yard. Please observe your pet's behavior and if they show any signs of stress or anxiety, give them safe haven in a secure crate or separate room.

On the other hand, if your dog is the life of the party, he may be fed extra or inappropriate foods by your guests causing weight gain and gastrointestinal distress. The buffet table is often too inviting for many pets, again leading to consumption of extra and possibly dangerous calories. Pancreatitis, inflammation of the pancreas, is often triggered by a high-fat meal such as left over meats or getting into the trash. This disease can be deadly. Of course you know that chocolate can be toxic, so don't allow your pet to eat any of that. Barring any food allergies or health problems, it is ok to give your pet a special treat for the holiday. However you should be the one to administer such treats so you can control the type and amount of food offered.

Take some time to relax with your pet this holiday season. Be considerate of their preferences for social activities. Take extra care to keep them safe from decorations and lights. And have a happy holiday season!

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