

Christmas Caution
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
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PETS' CHRISTMAS CARE

Christmas is coming (whatever the time of year!) and, vegetarian or not, in our modern affluent society, the traditional goose does not have the monopoly on getting fat. What does this festive time mean, however, for our pets? It is commendably unselfish that many of us ply our animals with gifts and festive food, sharing the abundance and feel-good factor of Christmas. That's fine, but we must be thoughtful about it. The home may also carry added risks to our pets at this time. Forewarned is forearmed.

Food: Unaccustomed rich food in a diet can cause digestive upsets, which are traumatic for animal and family alike. There's nothing like coming down on Boxing morning, to a pool of diarrhoea on the carpet, under the tree! Nothing wrecks great-aunt's enjoyment of the merry-making at meal times, like the sound of a retching cat under the table! Beware also the unintended feeding of alcohol in, say, a trifle. Whatever festive fare you give your animal should be in moderation and should be broadly in keeping with your general feeding policy. Any scraps, over and above the normal allowance, should be taken into account in your reckoning of size of later meals.

Gifts: Presents given to pets should, again, be consistent. If you have adopted healthy earthenware or similar receptacles, for instance, don't go buying a lot of coloured plastic bowls or toys. Avoid chews or other treats, with artificial colourants (colorants) and other chemical additives. Children love to dress animals up, for such festivities. It is best to oversee this activity, subtly, without being too overbearing!

Peace and goodwill to all: Make sure that a dog or cat is not 'mauled' by over-excited children. Be careful to oversee any dressing up the family dog, as this, too, can cause accidents. Animals like their quiet times and their own space, from time to time. Allow them this and try to allow their routine. In particular, don't miss daily walks, on account of a lot of merry-making.

Special dangers: Beware the added domestic dangers of Christmas activities. Trailing **electric leads**, in unaccustomed places, can attract puppies and kittens. Badly burned mouths and even deaths can result from chewing fairy light or other cables. **Baubles** on the Christmas tree fascinate cats. If they are made of glass, they can break if they fall and then they may cause injury. **Fairy lights** have always been a prime fire hazard. Ensure that your pet does not damage the wiring. Watch out for **candles**; a pet can easily overturn them. An enthusiastic Labrador's tail is famous for sweeping everything off a low table! Don't leave an active and inquisitive animal alone in a room with lit candles. A turkey carcass, left unguarded, can be stolen by a cat or dog, with the potential danger that **brittle cooked bones** can represent, especially if your pet is not used to bones in his normal diet. **Plastic wrapping, wire, string, ribbon and elastic bands** can be serious hazards. Be sure to clear up well, before a pet has access to a room in which items have been unwrapped. **Batteries** are toxic. Don't leave used batteries lying about for a pup to chew.

Try to maintain as much normal routine as possible, with mealtimes, exercise etc. If your dog is an 'only dog', visiting dogs represent unusual 'competition', possibly resulting in greater greed, with food being 'wolfed' rather more avidly than usual. At such times, normal restraint may be forgotten. Bones may be swallowed without proper chewing etc.

While on the subject of bones, no dog can be considered 100% safe with a possibly inconsiderate toddler, who cannot read a dog's warning signs. A dog should be allowed privacy and quiet in his or her personal area, so do not leave toddlers unattended with a dog.

Remember the likelihood of **fireworks** around midnight on New Year's Eve. It can be worse than 5th November, in some areas, so the same precautions apply. If you are seeing in the New Year, you can give comfort and medication if necessary. Don't forget to spare a thought for a fearful dog, while enjoying your glass of champers. If you turn in early, however, perhaps the dog could sleep in your bedroom or you could activate whatever other precautions you usually put in place, on and around 'bonfire night' (Guy Fawkes Night).

Finally, **pets are not toys**. Please don't buy them as Christmas presents!

Having got all those cautions off my chest, nothing is going to stop me enjoying my Christmas. I hope all our site visitors will also have a wonderful time and join us in the New Year, too, with renewed energy and glowing health.

Christopher Day – October 2002

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