

# Christmas can be hazardous for pets: What to look out for

December 13 2021, by Jacqueline Boyd

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Christmas is a wonderful time to relax with family and friends, both two and four legged. But it can be a scary and dangerous time for pets. Food, presents, decorations and even visitors to our homes can all become hazards. Vets typically report the festive season as being one of their [busiest times of year](#).

[Knowing the dangers](#) is key. It is also important to let everyone in the house know what is safe and what is not for [family pets](#). Prevention is always better than cure.

Visitors can be advised on pet etiquette, too. Some pets can get distressed by changes to their routine and anxious in the presence of unfamiliar people. Unfortunately, this has been [exacerbated by the pandemic](#). Be especially aware of leaving dogs unsupervised around [excited or unknown children](#) as bites are a real risk. Providing your pet with a safe, quiet space might be important to protect both your visitors and your pet.

Festive foods are a particular problem. A tasty treat for us can be fatal for some pets, so beware of sharing your festive meals with your pets. Some animals will be sensitive even to slight dietary changes, perhaps showing signs of digestive upset and discomfort.

Dogs tend to be less discriminating in their [food](#) choices than cats. This means that our dogs might be more likely to eat things they shouldn't, but care should be taken with cats, too.

Pancreatitis is a painful and distressing condition often seen in dogs who have [consumed fatty foods](#). Avoid giving leftovers to your pets to reduce this risk. Cooked bones can also cause significant injury, so make sure they can't get into the bins to steal scraps.

Mince pies, Christmas cake and puddings are full of [raisins](#)—which are toxic to dogs. Grapes, currants and sultanas are also dangerous for dogs and are hidden in many festive recipes. And macadamia nuts are a [health hazard](#), causing a range of symptoms including weakness, vomiting, stiffness and depression. Other nuts and seeds can pose a choking risk.

Alcohol needs to be strictly limited to human-only consumption. [Rotting](#)

[apples](#) have even caused alcohol poisoning in dogs, so keep food waste and leftovers out of harm's way, too. Access to [raw bread dough](#), blue cheese and salt-dough ornaments should also be avoided as they contain compounds that can cause significant illness.

Similarly, [onions, garlic and chives](#) contain chemicals that are toxic to cats and dogs—and cooking doesn't make them safer. As little as a single spoonful of sage and onion stuffing can cause harm.

Sweet treats are no safer. Chocolate is a significant concern, and holidays are associated with an increased risk of [chocolate toxicity](#). Even [artificial sweeteners](#), such as [xylitol](#)—which is commonly used in chewing gum—should be avoided.

## **Not just food**

Wrappers from sweets and chocolates can pose a risk if consumed. Indeed, digestive [foreign bodies](#) are a common problem for [dogs](#) and cats, often requiring emergency surgery. If consumed, toys, gifts and decorations can cause intestinal blockage and damage.

Be aware of plant hazards, too. Needles from Christmas trees can penetrate paws, causing pain and infection. Other festive plants such as poinsettia, mistletoe and holly berries are toxic if consumed. The leaves, petals and pollen of lilies are especially [dangerous for cats](#).

Antifreeze is another [hazard for cats](#) with the ingestion of small amounts potentially fatal. Colder temperatures mean antifreeze is commonly used on our vehicles and spillages can occur. Occasionally it is also found in some decorations, such as snow globes, so care should be taken to prevent inadvertent access by our pets.

In any case, where you think your pet has eaten or otherwise been

exposed to something potentially nasty, it is best to seek veterinary advice as soon as possible. By taking a bit of care over the [festive season](#), we can all make sure it is a safe and restful time for us, our pets and our pets' vets.

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