

Guelph, ON - It's the most wonderful time of the year.

It can also be the most hectic, with gift-toting visitors coming in and out of our homes. Not to mention the decorations and the food; lots of food.

"The most common Christmas-related illnesses or emergencies we see are related to dietary indiscretion," says Dr. Kendra Goulet, Head of Emergency Services at Mississauga - Oakville Veterinary Emergency Hospital. "Around the holidays pets have more opportunity to get into, and eat, things they should not."

Chocolate, for example, is toxic to pets. Chocolate contains theobromine, which can be fatal if taken in high doses. While theobromine poisoning is most common in dogs, the toxic dose in cats is even smaller (though cats are less likely to eat chocolate since they're not able to taste sweetness).

Dr. Goulet advises turkey, ham and other holiday dinner foods should also be kept away from pets, as they can cause a painful abdomen with associated vomiting and diarrhea.

"Pet owners should try to avoid feeding their pets, or avoid allowing others to feed their pets, food items from the dinner table," Dr. Goulet suggests. "Ensure that any food items set out during entertaining, including the garbage, are out of reach of pets. Remember that dogs and cats have a keen sense of smell and can find the chocolate or other food items wrapped up under the tree."

The addition of a Christmas tree to your home can pose festive threats to your pet. When ingested, ornaments, ribbon, tinsel and new toys can cause obstruction of their stomach and intestinal tract. Place gifts, decorations and ornaments out of your pet's reach if possible. And if your cat or dog becomes inexplicably fixated on a certain ornament or decoration, you may consider simply removing it.

Even with the most diligent pet parents, accidents can happen. Your dog may get her paws on that package of chocolate your neighbour brought over, or your cat might eat through your child's homemade pipe cleaner ornament. That's why it's important to keep your veterinarian's number close by.

Speak with your veterinary healthcare team about which **emergency clinic** is closest to you for those times when an emergency occurs out of regular business hours, such as over the Christmas holiday.

Contact:

Lise Rodgers
Canadian Animal Health Institute
519-763-7777



Santa's Little Helper:

A list of reminders for pet owners this holiday season.

1. Chocolate is toxic for pets. Watch where you place chocolate while entertaining guests, including wrapped chocolate under the tree.
2. Avoid feeding your pets turkey, ham and other holiday dinner food from the table & encourage your guests to do the same as these foods can lead to pain, vomiting, diarrhea.
3. When ingested, tinsel & ornaments can cause obstructions in the stomach or intestinal tract. Keep them out of your pet's reach.
4. Locate the closest emergency clinic in case of a pet emergency outside of regular business hours over the holiday.