

# Doggone it! Holidays can hold hidden hazards for pets

BY STACY M. STRUNK  
Copley News Service

During the holidays, many people eat too much of what they shouldn't.

This is true for pets, too. In fact, veterinarians say upset stomachs are the most common holiday-related problem they see in pets.

To pets, holidays bring new and enticing smells from the kitchen. Glittery objects can be found lying around and, in some homes, a tree mysteriously starts growing inside.

"What we see during the holiday season is more dogs with vomiting and diarrhea from holiday food and decorations," said Steve Juriga, a veterinarian at River Heights Veterinary in Oswego, Ill. "Or pets who get into the holiday cookies and chocolates. We also see them eating tinsel, string and pieces of plastic toys."

Juriga remembered one Dec. 26 he spent performing surgery on three separate dogs with intestinal obstructions. One ate Christmas ribbon, another ate a spool of thread and the third ate a cassette tape.

Part of the problem, Juriga said, is that people are home more during the holiday season. Things that are normally put neatly away are left out and pets get into them.

Jennifer Anda, a veterinarian with Vetsmart Pet Hospital in Aurora, Ill.,

recalled a cat that seemed determined to eat one special piece of tinsel. His owner caught him eating the tinsel off the tree and took the string from the cat's mouth. The owner, unfortunately, hung the tinsel back on the tree.

So, the cat waited until his owner wasn't looking and went back for a second try. This time he succeeded.

According to vets, cats are especially attracted to decorative ribbons and tinsel. But dogs are by no means immune to such temptations.

Dr. Judy McBeth, a vet at Fox Ridge Veterinary Clinic in Montgomery, Ill., once had a pet Labrador with a special fondness for eating the bows off presents. To avoid tempting young animals, pet owners should keep Christmas ornaments off the bottom couple branches of a tree, the vets suggested.

Anda recalled she once decorated a tree using cutouts from McDonald's Happy Meal boxes so her puppy wouldn't eat the decorations. And if he did, she reasoned, at least he could digest them.

Pet owners also should remind their guests not to feed "people food" to the dog or cat. People food is almost guaranteed to upset the stomach of a beloved animal. If pets must celebrate with the family, keep animal treats handy — and



out of your pet's reach — for guests to give.

Pet behavior is something else pet owners should consider this season. The holidays get a little hectic and animals can get overwhelmed, too.

"There is a lot of excitement in the house and they feel it. There's a lot of people and a lot of activity," Anda said. "Try to keep the same routine and expectations. If there are individuals who are getting your pet wound up, give him some time alone or take him for a walk."

Anda also suggested taking dogs for a walk before visitors come. It helps wear the dog out and keep him calm. The extra exercise amid the holidays is good for pets and owners alike.

Juriga said knowing your pet's personality is also

important at this time of year. Many pets would be completely overwhelmed in a house full of strangers. They should be locked in a room away from guests or chained outside in a dog run.

Other pets, he said, are sociable by nature and may be upset if kept away from the activities. If your pet is used to being among strangers, go ahead and let him join the party. You should still give your dog or cat a place to hide if he chooses.

If small children are attending the party, the animal must be watched at all times. Even the most docile pet can nip if there's a 2-year-old pulling on his ears and tail.

Live Christmas trees can cause a variety of problems. McBeth reminded pet own-

ers to avoid putting preservatives in the tree's water because animals can get sick from drinking the water.

And cats who still have all their claws might decide to take a stab at climbing the tree.

"I've got three cats and always get a live tree. I've never had a problem with that, but some cats are going to climb right up," said veterinarian Jerry Withers of the Eola Point Animal Hospital in Aurora. "They have Scat Mats that are shaped like tree skirts now. It gives the cat a little static shock to keep him away from the tree."

Five pet safety hazards you probably never thought about:

Veterinarians agree the most common holiday hazard is pets eating what they shouldn't. But here are five unusual hazards that could be overlooked:

**Nonstick cooking pans.** Certain nonstick surfaces, such as Teflon, can produce a gas that's dangerous to birds, said Jerry Withers, a veterinarian with the Eola Point Animal Hospital. Bird owners should be especially careful when using these utensils or avoid nonstick surfaces completely.

**Metal food and water dishes.** In cold weather, metal dishes can be hazardous for dogs and cats.

Giving a dog a metal water dish on a cold winter day is the equivalent of darning a grad schooler to put his tongue on a Dagpole.

**Large meals within two hours of exercise.** "Bloat" is a serious condition that occurs when large and deep-cheated breeds of dogs are fed a large meal within two hours of exercise or severe stress, tension and stomach distention, is life-threatening and must be treated by a veterinarian immediately. Symptoms include unproductive retching, panting, drooling and an enlarged stomach or torso.

**Salt.** The type of salt used to melt snow can burn a dog's footpads, according to the American Dog Trainers Network Web site. Dog owners should avoid walking over salted areas and should wash their pet's feet when they return from a walk.

**Garbage.** Pet owners should try to remember to take out their garbage, especially if it contains food scraps, as soon as possible. Veterinarians said some stomach problems at this time of year are caused by dogs getting into the garbage and eating scraps. Things like turkey bones and plastic wrap are especially harmful.

# Capturing the moment: How to take picture-perfect holiday photographs

BY DEIRDRE O'SHEA  
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Christmas is a season of lights. During December, towns and homes will be lit like holiday postcards, with candles and Christmas trees, menorahs and angels, fireplaces and electric lights. When amateur photographers try to capture holiday moments, they are often disappointed.

One photographer says a simple change can make all the difference.

"If you use a flash, you

completely destroy the mood of that lighting," said photographer Nick Kelsh. "Learn how to turn off the flash and take the picture with the existing light."

Kelsh is the author of "How to Photograph Your Life: Capturing Everyday Moments With Your Camera and Your Heart." Turning off the flash is just one of four tips he offers to improve one's chances of taking stellar photos this holiday season.

With a little tweaking, he said, ordinary photographers will see a big improvement in their pictures. One thing shouldn't change though, said Kelsh. Keep taking photographs of what moves you.

Kelsh says his tips are "the essence of simplicity," and yet thousands of photo albums full of so-so snapshots attest that they aren't obvious.

First, get close to your subject.

"And I don't mean if you're used to standing 12 feet away now you stand 10 feet away," said Kelsh. "Walk up to your subject until you are three feet away. Fill the frame with your subject."

To capture your child talking to Santa, move in until you are almost cropping off the top of Santa's head.

"If you don't occasionally feel like you are invading someone's space," Kelsh said, "then you aren't getting close enough."

Next, take a lot of pictures. This year, for the first time, sales of digital cameras are expected to outpace film cameras (not including disposable cameras).

"A digital camera will greatly improve your chances of taking one or two good pictures from every situation if you use the buttons," said Kelsh, "shutter and delete."

Professional photographers take many pictures in the hopes of getting one great photo.

There's one tip that can be intimidating for the amateur — turn off the flash. But the person who does try it, says Kelsh, should get a reputation among family and friends as the one who takes great photos.

"Become aware of the natural light that looks good in photos," says Kelsh. "Move your subject into good light."

Good light is soft light — for example, light that reflects off the snow and onto your subject. Never shoot someone with sunlight falling directly on his face.

To go without a flash in dark places, the trick is to create an alternative light source. Try this experiment, Kelsh says. Take two photos of your Christmas tree, one with a flash and one without the flash (be very still). Look at them side by side and you'll see that the one without the flash looks much, much better. It's warm, glowing; you can see the color of the lights. The one without the flash looks washed out — cold. A candlelight church service on Christmas Eve makes a beautiful photo without a flash.

Kelsh further explains that there are some times when using the flash is the right thing to do, such as spontaneous situations without proper light — a party, for example — when it makes perfect sense to run around with the flash on. However, the other tips apply.

"At a Christmas party, have three people put their heads together, then get in close," said Kelsh. However, for a picture of your wife and daughter wrapping gifts, pose them next to the soft light source.

Now, soft light is not much light. Turn the ASA settings up high, to 400, Kelsh advised. This slows down the shutter speed.

There will be a slight loss in quality, but not enough to worry about. Use a chair or table to rest your arms on (a tripod is ideal, but not many people own one)

since the picture will be taken more slowly and you don't want it to be blurry. Try to get your subject to be still, too.

Here's how Kelsh would photograph your home this holiday season: Turn on all the lights in the house and all the decorative outdoor lights. Wait until the magic

fifteen minutes before sunset, when there is still light in the sky behind the house. Try to balance the existing light in the sky with the lights in your house.

"With any luck," Kelsh says, "you'll have next year's Christmas photo!"

## Sitting pretty

The holidays are a wonderful time to dress up the little ones and set them down for traditional portraits. But a lot can go haywire in the time between when you get them dressed and when the photographer says, "Cheese."

Here are some tips for making the most out of your portrait studio experience.

■ Simple clothes work best. Make sure clothing fits well and avoid baggy styles. Clothing with a little interest around the shoulders works well.

■ Avoid abundant lace or frills that overpower the child in the portrait. The fancier the child's clothes, the simpler the background should be.

■ Dress children in polished black or colored shoes that coordinate with the outfit. On baby girls, avoid tights, which tend to bag; on boys, match socks and pants.

■ Reds and bright colors photograph well against a black background.

■ Children's hair should be trimmed neatly and simple hairstyles are best. Keep barrettes and ribbons to a minimum.

■ If your child's hair has static, wet flyaway hairs with a damp hairbrush.

■ Depending on the age of the child, parents should bring along a hairbrush, bottle, pacifier, diapers, baby blanket, change of clothes and two favorite toys for distraction.

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