

## Paws for Pets

### Winter Holiday Hazards for Pets

Here are some tips for keeping your pets out of danger during the holiday season.

#### **AVOID Holiday Food Items That Could Cause Problems For Your Pet**

- **Chocolate** (baker's, semi-sweet, milk chocolate) Many people do not realize that chocolate can be a poison. Unsweetened baking chocolate carries a much higher dose of the toxin theobromine than does milk chocolate, but even normal milk chocolate can be dangerous. Clinical signs of chocolate poisoning include hyperexcitability, nervousness, vomiting, and diarrhea and death.
- **Coffee** (grounds, beans, chocolate covered espresso beans)
- **Moldy or spoiled foods**
- **Onions, onion powder**
- **Fatty foods**
- **Salt**
- **Yeast dough**

#### **PLANTS**

**Lilies** that may be found in holiday flower arrangements could be deadly to your cat. Many types of lily, such as Tiger, Asian, Japanese Show, Easter, Stargazer, and the Casa Blanca, can cause kidney failure in cats.

**Poinsettias** are generally over-rated in toxicity. If ingested, poinsettias can be irritating to the mouth and stomach, and may cause mild vomiting or nausea.

**Mistletoe** has the potential to cause cardiovascular problems. However, mistletoe ingestion usually only causes gastrointestinal upset. The fact that there are several types of mistletoe makes it difficult to predict the clinical signs of

poisoning. Some mistletoes produce only stomach upset while others may lead to liver failure or seizing. Consider mistletoe to be a hazardous substance and keep it inaccessible to pets and children.

**Holly** ingestion could cause vomiting, nausea, diarrhea, and lethargy.

#### **HAZARDS AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE**

**Christmas tree water** may contain fertilizers, which, if ingested, can cause stomach upset. Stagnant tree water can be breeding grounds for bacteria, which can also lead to vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea, if ingested.

**Electric cords**- Avoid animal exposure to electric cords. These are tempting to cats who like to play with string as well as to puppies who are teething and interested in chewing. If a pet bites through an electrical cord, it could result in a severe burn to the tongue which causes the pet's lung to fill with fluid, causing respiratory distress. This is an emergency requiring immediate veterinary attention. If they were chewed, they could electrocute your pet. Cover up or hide electric cords, never let your pet chew on them.

**Ribbons or tinsel** can get caught up in the intestines and cause intestinal obstruction. These are of special interest to playful cats and kittens who see these materials as toys (or prey) to be chased, pounced upon, chewed or swallowed. While chasing and pouncing pose no health threats, chewing and swallowing do, as these strings or "linear foreign bodies" can catch in the GI tract, leading to bunching of intestine as the body tries in vain to move the string or ribbon through. This is a life-threatening condition requiring surgery for correction. Supervise animals who play with string closely.



## Winter Holiday Hazards continued

**Batteries** contain corrosives. If ingested they can cause ulceration to the mouth, tongue, and the rest of the gastrointestinal tract.

**Glass ornaments** can cut the tissues of the gastrointestinal tract if ingested.

### MEDICATIONS

Keep all prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs out of the reach of your pets, preferably in closed cabinets. Pain killers, cold medicines, anti-cancer, drugs, antidepressants, vitamins, and diet pills are common examples of human medication that could be potentially lethal even in small dosages. One regular-strength ibuprofen tablet (200mg) can cause stomach ulcers in a 10-pound dog. Remind holiday guests to store their medications safely as well.

### DIETARY INDISCRETION

We all like to include our pets in Holiday meals along with the rest of the family, but try to keep in mind that sudden rich diet changes are likely to upset a pet's stomach. Vomiting and diarrhea are not uncommon. If leftovers are of an especially fatty nature, the pancreas may become inflamed and overloaded. This condition is serious and may require hospitalization

### OTHER WINTER HAZARDS

**Antifreeze** has a pleasant taste. Unfortunately, very small amounts can be lethal. As little as one teaspoon of antifreeze can be deadly to a cat; less than four teaspoons can be dangerous to a 10-pound dog. Thoroughly clean up any spills, store antifreeze in tightly closed containers and store in secured cabinets. Automotive products such as gasoline, oil and antifreeze should be stored in areas that are inaccessible to your pets. Propylene glycol is a safer form of antifreeze. Low Tox™ brand antifreeze contains propylene glycol and is recommended to use in pet households.

If you think your pet has consumed antifreeze, contact your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-4-ANI-HELP) right away!

**Liquid potpourris** are popular household fragrances commonly used during the holiday season. Pets are often exposed to liquid potpourri by direct ingestion from simmer pots or spills, or by rubbing against leaky bottles or simmer pots containing the potpourri, or from spilling the containers upon themselves. Oral exposures result following grooming. Exposure of pets to some types of liquid potpourris can result in severe oral, dermal and ocular damage.



Hazards around the Christmas Tree

**Ice melting products** can be irritating to skin and mouth. Depending on the actual ingredient of the ice melt and the quantity, signs of ingestion would include excessive drooling, depression, vomiting or even electrolyte imbalances.

**Rat and mouse** commonly during using rat and mouse bait, place the products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals.

**ALWAYS Be Prepared !!!!**

Your animal may become poisoned in spite of your best efforts to prevent it. You should keep telephone numbers for your veterinarian, a local emergency veterinary service, and the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center in a convenient location. If you suspect that your pet has ingested something poisonous, seek medical attention immediately.

Be careful how you deck your halls! The holiday season is generally a time of family togetherness in which even our pets participate. One's thoughts generally are far from thoughts of injury; however, one must be aware of some important seasonal hazards in order to insure a happy holiday.



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**killers** are used more colder weather. When

# How to Care for Ferrets

## 1. Pick out Some Furniture

Ferrets' ancestors were den animals, so the home you create should be like a den, too. Use a wire cage that's at least 18 inches long, 18 inches deep, and 30 inches wide. Many ferrets prefer bi-level cages that feature stairs or ramps that they can climb, and shelves or hammocks where they can perch. Avoid aquariums, which provide poor ventilation. Because ferrets are accomplished escape artists, the cage should feature a secure latch and openings no larger than one inch by two inches. Since wire flooring is uncomfortable to a ferret's feet, place linoleum tiles on the floor or line the cage bottom with soft material such as washable carpet. Not all materials will work, however: Wood flooring is difficult to disinfect, newspaper will blacken a ferret's feet, and cedar chips hold in bad odors and may even cause respiratory problems. Place the cage away from direct sunlight, in a cool, shaded area where temperatures range between 55 and 70 degrees. Clean bedding with a mild detergent and hot water, then disinfect the cage.

## 2. Teach 'Em Litter Literacy

You can save time cleaning a ferret's cage by simply teaching the animal to use a litter pan. Find a small cardboard or plastic tray that is three to five inches high to serve as a litter box, and secure it to one side of the cage, away from sleeping and eating areas. Clumping litter will irritate a ferret's eyes and may cause respiratory problems, so fill the litter tray with one inch or more of pelleted litter products made from paper or plant fibers. Ferrets aren't as fastidious as cats and may not cover their waste regularly, so you will probably need to scoop the litter more often.

## 3. Show 'Em a Good Time

Like cats, ferrets enjoy their naps and will often sleep 15 to 20 hours a day. But when awake, ferrets like to be active, so the more you entertain them, the happier—and less mischievous—they'll be. Ferrets love to crawl through almost anything, including PVC piping, cardboard boxes, paper bags, clothes dryer hoses, and even denim blue jeans. Safely secure a toy to the top of the cage, and your guest may be content to bat the object around for a while.

## 4. Set the Table

Ferrets are obligate carnivores and their good health depends on a quality ferret diet that contains at least 34% animal meat protein and 22% fat. Cat and dog foods are not appropriate. Snacks, such as chicken or turkey, are recom-

mended. Vegetables should be avoided because they are difficult to digest and may cause choking or gastrointestinal blockages. Fruits should not be given because they contain fructose and sugars that have been shown to exacerbate insulinoma conditions. Egg whites (albumin) and raw onion can lead to hemolytic anemia.

## 5. Hold on Loosely

Ferrets are social creatures who enjoy visiting with people, so let them roam frequently in a secure area outside of their cages. Although they have a great sense of smell and acute hearing, ferrets have limited vision, which means you should avoid sudden movements and speak in a gentle voice before approaching. Because ferrets have fragile skeletons, be sure to handle them carefully. Never pick up a ferret by the tail; instead, let the ferret come to you, then lift him from behind using two hands—one to support his chest and one to cradle his hips. You can also grasp the scruff of a ferret's neck and support his bottom with your hands. Remember, too, that ferrets are known to nip. If you point a finger at a ferret or poke him, he may think you're an enemy or a source of food.



## 6. Keep 'Em Clean

To put it kindly, ferrets don't always come up smelling like roses. A ferret's sebaceous glands, which are used to mark territory, secrete oil with a natural musky odor, and the animal's anal scent glands can spray just like a skunk's. You should spay or neuter your ferret to minimize odors, and also change the bedding frequently. Bathing a ferret with kitten shampoo, ferret shampoo, or diluted baby shampoo can also help. But too many baths will only force the animal's scent and oil glands to work overtime.

Ferrets are prone to ear mites, so every few weeks their ears should be cleaned with a cotton swab soaked in a cleanser purchased at a pet supply store. Like dogs and cats, ferrets are prone to fleas and ticks, but a veterinarian should help you meet their needs in that department.