

## 'Tis the Season to Keep Your Dog Safe!

**These 15 tips will protect your dog from holiday hazards.**

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The Benkowski household in Euclid, Ohio, was ready for the holidays, the tree trimmed and stockings hung, when a near disaster struck: A Christmas stocking was missing, and Beulah, a 1½-year-old American Bulldog, was vomiting bile and had stopped eating. X-rays suggested the decoration had lodged in her stomach. She needed immediate surgery. "I was devastated," said Tracy Benkowski. "I kept thinking, 'It's Christmas, I can't lose her now!'"

Fortunately, Beulah recovered and Benkowski learned her lesson. The next Christmas, she kept all chewable items and gifts out of reach or behind closed doors and baby gates.

It is easy for pets to get in trouble during the holidays, said Jeffrey Proulx, DVM, a board-certified emergency veterinarian and staff member at the Dove Lewis Memorial Emergency Veterinary Hospital in Portland, Ore. "Pet owners may get so busy, they lose track of what is going on with their dogs." In addition, many gifts, decorations and holiday foods pose dangers for dogs. "Be aware of the extra hazards around the holidays, and pay attention to what your dog is doing," Dr. Proulx said.

Keep your holidays safe, healthy and happy with these tips:

1. Anticipate guest arrivals and confine your dog to prevent escape out the open door, running away or in front of a car.
2. Reduce stress by maintaining your dog's regular feeding and exercise routine and setting aside a quiet room where it can escape from holiday parties. Too much excitement may cause stomach upset or trigger a preexisting illness.
3. Place mystery packages out of reach. Dogs often chew apart packages containing food that could make them sick. "Food is the No. 1 holiday hazard for dogs," said Amy Marder, VMD, vice president of companion animal services for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "Greasy, fatty stuff we eat can cause mass havoc on an animal's intestines."
4. Tell guests to avoid giving treats from the dinner table. Poultry skin, fat, trimmings, rich gravies and buttery sauces can cause severe vomiting, bloody diarrhea and even life-threatening inflammation of the pancreas. An ounce of a 20- to 40-proof alcoholic beverage can put a small dog in a coma.