

Give Your Dog Safety This Holiday Season

AVMA offers tips for healthy, happy celebrations for all.

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People often want to involve their dogs and other pets in holiday celebrations, but dog owners need to focus on keeping their pets healthy, according to James Cook, DVM, president of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Every year, Cook treats pets who have become sick because of holiday excesses, he says. Some animals can't be saved.

To avoid a pet tragedy, the AVMA offers its best holiday health tips: Keep table scraps out of your dog or puppy's diet. "Salty, spicy, and greasy" can be deadly, Cook says. Fatty foods can cause a life-threatening condition called pancreatitis, and bones can splinter in your dog's digestive tract.

.Chocolate should be out of reach of dogs because it's poisonous. The darker the chocolate, the more dangerous – with baker's chocolate being the most toxic.

.Avoid sweets. A study reported in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association linked Xylitol – a common sweetener in baked goods, candy, and chewing gum – with liver failure and death in dogs.

.Give your dog or puppy healthy holiday snacks. Recipes are available on the Internet and in doggie cookbooks. You can also visit a pet store or doggie bakery for some special treats. Ask your veterinarian about healthy treats.

.Anchor your holiday tree. It's a temptation for pets, and, if it topples, it can cause severe injuries. Keep your dog away from the tree water as tree preservatives and sap can cause gastrointestinal problems.

.Never leave a pet alone with a lit candle or exposed flame, and be wary of exposed extension cords. Puppies, especially, often like to chew on cords.

.Don't let dogs or puppies dine on holiday plants. Holly, cedar, balsam, pine, and mistletoe are poisonous. Poinsettia can make your dog sick as well.

.Be careful about ornaments. Your dog may think they're to play with or cut himself if he knocks one off the tree.

.Finally, don't give a dog or puppy as a holiday gift. It's a stressful time, and a new pet need his owner's full attention to settle into a new home. Instead, give a pet basket of supplies the new dog will need.