

## CHRISTMAS TIME TROUBLES

Christmas is once again almost upon us, trees are being decorated, presents wrapped and celebrations will soon begin in earnest. It's a busy time of year for everyone, but have you ever considered what Christmas means to your pets?

Suddenly strangers arrive in their home, suitcases appear from the loft, and a tree appears in the middle of the sitting room which pushes the dog's bed out and into the hall. Presents appear all wrapped up under the tree and some smell delicious and deserve further investigation.

Any form of change can be very stressful for a cat or dog, they are creatures of habit and like to stick to their usual routines. They don't understand it's a special time of year and to be honest they probably wouldn't really care - all they know is suddenly their world is turned upside down.

One big problem for cats and dogs is the fireworks, no longer confined to November 5<sup>th</sup>, they now go on all over the Christmas period too, sometimes beginning on Christmas Eve and lasting until New Year 's Day. Unfortunately it's very difficult for an owner to predict when they will begin and end. The best solution is to be prepared and provide some sort of 'den' which your pet can hide in when they do begin. This could be under the dining room table with blankets draped over to offer shelter, in a crate or cage if your pet is already used to one, again draped in blankets. Leave the radio or TV on as background noise and avoid walking your dog in the dark as this is when fireworks are most likely to be going off. For cats you could try keeping them in at night, however for some that's more stressful than the noise.

Other potentially hazardous or stressful situations to consider at Christmas include:

### Visitors

Try to find a room to offer your pet/s where they won't be disturbed, a place with a comfy bed and food and water is all they need to be a little more relaxed while there is chaos in the rest of the house. Ask your guests not to disturb the animals during their stay and let the animals go to the guests for fuss if they choose to.

### Going on Holiday

If your pet is going to the kennels or cattery while you are away, consider taking them for a short stay before Christmas. That way the kennels/cattery won't be so unfamiliar when they are left for a longer period of time. They will also be reassured that last time they were left you did come back for them! Take a few familiar items such as their own food and water bowls, bedding and a jumper you've been wearing. These items will all have a familiar scent and help to reassure them. Taking enough of their regular food will also help to avoid an upset stomach on your return. There are also various hormone products on the market to help alleviate stress and create a calm feeling for these situations, please enquire at the practice for further help and advice.

### Christmas Trees

While lovely for us humans to decorate and admire it must be quite strange for a cat or dog to suddenly have a large tree in the middle of the house.

After all, trees are for climbing and cocking your leg on outside, surely?

The sparkle of the lights and tinsel is too tempting for some, it needs investigating or even tasting sometimes! Unfortunately, tinsel is indigestible and lights tend to give a shock when chewed. Make sure all decorations are firmly attached to the tree, switch the lights off at the wall when you are not in the room and make sure your pets are supervised when near the tree.

### Turkey bones

It is perfectly acceptable to want to spoil your pet at Christmas but there are a few do's and don'ts that you should bear in mind. Turkey bones are very brittle, they tend to splinter when chewed which means they can act like razors on the intestines if swallowed. They can get stuck in the intestines and stomach and may need surgical intervention to remove them. The best treat to offer would be a small amount of cooked turkey - with out the skin or any gravy! Sounds tasteless but the gravy and skin are very rich and dogs and cats are not used to this in their regular diet. They will enjoy the plain meat just as much.

### Wrapping paper and other packaging

Ribbon and paper can also cause a blockage in the intestine of a cat or dog. Be careful to dispose of paper wrap and ribbon correctly.

### Chocolate toxicity

Chocolate is poisonous to dogs. Be careful not to leave a tempting tin full of them out for the dog to help himself to. It causes increased heart rate, vomiting, diarrhoea, hyper-excitability and muscle tremors. Chocolate contains THEOBROMINE which belongs to the same chemical compound family as caffeine. Although dogs would need to eat a lot of milk chocolate to become unwell, approximately 100-150mg/kg, dark and cooking chocolate have much higher concentrations of theobromine and care must be taken to avoid ingestion.

If your dog does eat chocolate, even if you are unsure of the amount, it is always best to contact the vet. Usually the pet will need to be put on an intra-venous infusion to prevent dehydration and often the vet will induce vomiting to get the chocolate out of the stomach. Some animals do not show any clinical signs of chocolate toxicity until 72 hours after ingestion as absorption is slow; however they then become very unwell very quickly.

### Diarrhoea

A common all year round problem really but often seen at Christmas due to excitement or dietary changes.

To avoid this problem keep your pet on their regular diet and avoid overindulgence of treats, for example turkey, gravy, cream and any other leftovers. Keep stress levels to a minimum and keep routines as regular as possible.

### Treatment of mild diarrhoea:

- ❖ Starve for 24hrs
- ❖ Offer small sips of water to prevent dehydration but do not allow a whole bowl of water to be consumed rapidly
- ❖ Offer garden access to toilet frequently, preventing accidents
- ❖ Re-introduce bland food after 24hrs, for example boiled chicken and rice for 2 days
  - ❖ Gradually re introduce usual food over the next 2 days
- ❖ If diarrhoea persists or is accompanied by any other symptoms contact the vet

We would like to wish our clients and their pets a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.