

Holiday Food and Your Pet

As the holidays approach, I always say to my kids “no trips to hospital”. This also applies to our pets – if only they’d listen!

But if you have a dog like mine (or a cat for that matter) that eats anything, what do you have to hide away?

I’m hoping most of you are aware of chocolate poisoning and don’t put your wrapped chocolates and sweets under the tree within reach of the family pet! Chocolate contains caffeine and theobromide, lots in high percentage cacao dark or bitter chocolate, less in the milk and white chocolate. Both of these stimulants affect the brain, heart and digestive system in as little as one hour after stealing the kids chocolate bar. Hyperactivity, increased heart rate, tremors, vomiting and diarrhoea are all clinical signs. There is no antidote, but we can make the patient (thief!) vomit as soon as possible - ideally within an hour of eating to prevent further absorption.

Another less known toxic agent is the grape and raisins. They are everywhere at Christmas! We are unsure if cats are affected, but dogs have vomiting and diarrhoea, lethargy and stop eating. Bad cases develop kidney failure which can lead to death. Vines aren’t the same species everywhere and I’d say that here in New Zealand, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of harm after the odd grape is eaten.

Not toxic BUT enough to make dogs ill, especially if over-indulgence is allowed, is the Christmas ham. The high salt content will make pets vomit if given in anything but very small amounts. While the dog may enjoy the bone just think of those teeth. Bones are the commonest cause of broken teeth, especially those big upper strong carnassial molars that are the main chewers. Fractured teeth hurt and often become infected, these are difficult and expensive to extract. So give them a proper dental chew instead, Greenies, Dentastix and pigs ears are all kinder on those teeth.

