



# Surviving Christmas with Puppy under Foot

By Dr Gretta Howard – Senior veterinarian

## 1. Foods that are toxic to your pet

Christmas is a time to celebrate with friends and family and with these celebrations comes gifts and delicious food – some of which can be dangerous to your dog or cat if eaten.

Below is a **list of banned foods for pets** that you need to keep well away from your pet or risk dangerous consequences and an emergency trip to the vet.

<b>Foods toxic to dogs and cats</b>	<b>Clinical signs if ingested</b>
<b>Chocolate</b>	Vomiting, diarrhoea, heart arrhythmias, tremors, seizures, death due to theobromine found in chocolate – dark chocolate is more toxic than milk chocolate
<b>Onion and garlic</b>	Weakness and pale gums due to anaemia from red blood cell destruction
<b>Macadamia nuts</b>	Incoordination and neurological signs
<b>Grapes/sultanas/raisins</b>	Kidney failure – susceptibility varies between individuals and is unpredictable
<b>Xylitol (sweetener)</b>	Low blood sugar, seizures, liver failure – often found in chewing gums, artificial sweeteners in drinks
<b>Caffeine</b>	Vomiting, diarrhoea, tremors, heart arrhythmias, tremors, seizures, death – found in coffee beans, tea bags, energy drinks

If you suspect your pet has ingested one of the above items, please phone to make an appointment as we may recommend that an injection be given to induce vomiting.

## 2. Pancreatitis

During the summer holidays, our practice sees a surge of canine pancreatitis cases because there is a lot of fatty food being served such as rich sauces, cheese, bacon, sausages and creamy desserts. Unlike humans, a dog's gastrointestinal system cannot handle a diet high in fat content. In fact, this can trigger a nasty cascade of



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events leading to pancreatitis – severe inflammation of the pancreas, which is the organ responsible for digestive enzyme production as well as insulin production.

Clinical signs of pancreatitis include:

- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Lethargy
- Fever
- Collapse

Pancreatitis in dogs needs to be addressed urgently, often as a hospital patient, with intravenous fluid therapy, pain relief and sometimes antibiotics if indicated.

Treatment continues until the pancreas settles down and the inflammation has resolved. Without prompt treatment, pancreatitis in some cases can be fatal, so be sure to see your vet immediately if you suspect your dog has pancreatitis.

It is best to avoid pancreatitis in the first place by ensuring the human food is out of reach of your dog and not offering your pet the left-overs after Christmas dinner!

### 3. Foreign body ingestion

After unwrapping presents, it is important to properly dispose of any Christmas ribbon that cats and dogs might find fun to chew on, as these items can end up lodged in their intestines, known as string foreign bodies, requiring emergency life-saving surgery.

Toys can present a danger if they have small parts that are consumed, so remind your kids to tidy up after themselves so that the missing piece of Lego your pet ate doesn't end up being found during surgery.

Another common scenario is for dogs to ingest skewers that have been used on the BBQ which are extremely dangerous as they can penetrate the stomach wall if eaten.

Christmas hams often come wrapped in an elastic netting which to your dog tastes delicious but in reality, are impossible to digest, leading to an intestinal obstruction and emergency surgery.



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Stoned fruits, such as peaches and mangoes, can also lead to intestinal obstruction when they are discarded in the garden, only to later be found and consumed by the family dog.

These items are regularly removed from garbage bins by dogs and eaten, only to deal with life-threatening consequences later on. So, remember to always keep your bins secure!

## 4. Heat exhaustion

During summer, the risk of overheating during exercise or being left in cars can be life-threatening. Never leave your pet in a car to avoid this disastrous outcome. Your dog's core body temperature is higher than ours and they also have their fur coat on all year round. Choose either early morning or evening to exercise your dog, as sometimes even they don't know when to stop. Heat exhaustion can lead to organ failure if treatment is left too late unfortunately.

Breeds with a brachycephalic conformation (flat faces) have a much higher incidence of overheating as their airways are not as effective in oxygen delivery and cooling down, so be particularly careful with flat-faced breeds.

Overweight dogs are also in the higher risk category for heat exhaustion, so placing your dog on a diet is a sensible option.

## 5. Tick paralysis

You can never be too careful about ticks. Approximately 90% of the cases we see with tick paralysis are not on any preventative. If you're not sure when you last administered your pet a tick preventative, it is safer to give it again than leave your pet potentially unprotected.

To protect your pet, DO NOT DELAY please follow the following recommendations:

### **DOGS:**

- Bravecto chew every 3 months OR Simparica chew every month all year round PLUS a Seresto collar

### **CATS:**



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- Bravecto spot-on applied to the skin on the back of the neck every 2 months PLUS a Seresto collar

We are recommending that dogs and cats wear a Seresto tick collar for both dogs and cats to repel ticks in addition to the oral preventatives, as this will hopefully reduce the number of ticks that attach to your pet and therefore save lives. Seresto collars should be replaced every 4 months.

*Clinical signs of tick toxicity include:*

- Vomiting
- Change in the sound of your dog's bark
- Inco-ordinated back legs progressing to paralysis of all limbs
- Breathing difficulties

Remember to seek veterinary attention if your pet becomes unwell as the earlier that treatment is instituted, the higher the chance that your pet survives.