

FESTIVE FEEDING WATCH OUTS

In this latest feature, Nicole Paley of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, gives advice on festive foods that can be harmful to pets and highlights the importance of maintaining the usual feeding and exercise routine during the holidays.

FESTIVE FOODS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR PETS

Many of our favourite festive foods have hidden dangers for pets so owners need to be aware and keep them out of paws reach:

Chocolate – According to the BVA, chocolate remains one of the most common causes of toxin ingestion in pets over the festive period. Chocolate contains a chemical called theobromine, which is poisonous to dogs, cats, rodents and rabbits. The richer and darker the chocolate, the more theobromine it is likely to contain. Chocolate can initially cause vomiting and diarrhoea but it is a stimulant which can lead to pets becoming over excited as well as developing muscle twitches, tremors, fitting and life-threatening heart conditions. Severe cases can be fatal and even relatively small amounts of chocolate can be harmful especially considering dogs are smaller than people.

Grapes, raisins, currants and sultanas – These are common ingredients in a range of festive foods (such as Christmas cake, Christmas pudding, mince pies), all foods containing these fruits should be kept away from pets.

Macadamia nuts and peanuts – Can cause weakness and tremors. Macadamia butter can also affect dogs.

Blue cheese – Roquefort and other blue cheeses contain a substance called roquefortine C, which is the substance produced by the fungus



used in these cheeses. Dogs appear to be sensitive to this substance and it can cause dogs to develop muscle tremors and seizures.

Onions, garlic, leeks, chives and shallots (the Allium family) – All contain a substance which can damage the red blood cells causing anaemia. Ensure foods such as stuffing, onion based gravies or any other allium based foods are kept away from pets.

Xylitol – is a sugar substitute in a number of food items (e.g. sugar free chewing gum and sweets) and is increasingly used in medications and nicotine replacement chewing gums.

Fatty foods – Many festive foods are rich and high in fat. Owners need to be careful what they feed to their pets keeping fatty, human food treats to a minimum. Any treats given need to be taken in to consideration at mealtimes and they should make up no more than 10 percent of the pet's daily food ration.

Alcohol – Pets are believed to be even more sensitive to ethanol than humans so even a tiny intake can have a significant impact. It goes without saying that pets should not have any alcohol.

Caffeine – In large quantities can affect a pet's heart. Keep teabags and coffee out of reach.

BE PLANT AWARE

Plants such as poinsettia, holly, ivy, mistletoe. Potpourri (dried plants) can be harmful to pets so please make owners plant aware. The Animal Welfare Foundation have produced a comprehensive list of pet poisons, please visit: www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk. The Veterinary Poisons Information is another useful resource for members to be aware of: <https://vpisglobal.com>.

If owners are concerned their pet may have eaten something they shouldn't have, they should consult their vet immediately.

GENERAL ADVICE

Pets, like children, thrive on routine. Our advice to owners is to stick to their usual feeding routine and continue the regular walks and play sessions. Keep harmful foods, plants and alcohol out of the way of pets.

A sudden change to a pet's diet over the festive period may seem like a treat for the pet and allows them to join in the festivities but it can lead to digestive upsets, vomiting and diarrhoea which would spoil everyone's Christmas. 🐾