

The Dangers of Overindulging Your Pets during the Holidays

Thanksgiving-that special time of the year when people look forward to making their plans for the holiday season-is almost here. Nothing is quite as inviting as the aroma of a turkey basting in the oven and all the fixings that go with it. As homes begin to transform with holiday spirit, families and friends gather for visits and celebrations. Our pets also share in in the joy of the holiday season with us. They always seem to look their cutest while begging for-and sometimes receiving- a taste of our celebrations. It is important to remember that allowing our pets to join us in our holiday feasts can sometimes lead to upset stomachs, cause diarrhea and even result in an unexpected visit to the emergency clinic or veterinarian's office.

You may find it difficult at times to ignore a cat's constant meow or a dog's imploring looks as it begs for a taste of your holiday meal, but be sure not to overindulge their appetites. As boring as it sounds to us, pets thrive on a stable diet of the same food. For every junk yard dog with a cast-iron gut, there are 30 other pets that cannot handle a sudden change in the consistency of their diet. A well-balanced pet food with the proper ratio of protein, carbohydrates and fats gives a pet a healthy, well-regulated digestive system. Although some pets are able to enjoy a piece of the white meat from a turkey and a small helping of vegetables (without gravy or butter), others will end up with cramps and distress from even the smallest amount of something different than their usual food.

If you feel you must share your holiday dinner with

your four-legged family members, remember that pets should only be given a very small amount of lean meat (i.e., low-fat chicken or turkey), vegetables and fruits. Foods to avoid include sauces, gravies, butter, sugars, dairy products or anything high in oils or fats. Do not allow your pet to chew on turkey bones, which can cause serious health problems. They can become lodged in the mouth, or small shards may get stuck in or even perforate the esophagus, stomach or intestinal tract. These brittle bones can cause so much damage internally that the outcome may be catastrophic or even fatal.

Veterinarians generally tell clients not to give their pets any "people food" at all in order to avoid potential gastrointestinal pain for pets and expensive veterinary care bills for their pet owner. However, since it is human nature to include all family members, as well as our pets, in our holiday celebrations, I just ask that you remember these two simple rules:

Rule #1: Only feed your pets healthy choices

Rule #2: Feed your pets very small amounts

Our pets are much smaller than we are and do not need larger portions of any kind of food, even for those that are healthy. In closing, as you gather with your family and friends for Thanksgiving dinner, as tempting as it may be to overindulge your pets, the best advice I can give is to remember that moderation is the key to a successful celebration.