

# HOLIDAY HAZARDS FOR PETS

By Dr. Mona S. Miller

As the holidays approach, with decorations, aromas and good food around, I would like to describe some hazards these may present to our furry friends...

**DECORATIONS** ~ As unlikely as it seems, non-edible decorations are commonly eaten by dogs and cats – tinsel, scented candles, Christmas lights and ornaments are among the most popular items. These can cause trauma to the mouth (especially electrical cords) or cause digestive upset, even intestinal obstruction.

**PLANTS** ~ When ingested, poinsettia sap, holly berries and most parts of mistletoe can cause direct irritation to the digestive system, resulting in drooling, loss of appetite, vomiting and diarrhea. Treatment is based on the signs seen in the pet, and includes fluid support, stomach protectants and anti-nausea medication.

**FOODS** ~ Chocolate, grapes and raisins, macadamia nuts and bread dough all present some potentially serious hazards to our pets, especially for the dogs who carefully check out the frenzy of baking activity that occurs this time of year!

Chocolate is a well-known stimulant toxin for dogs – the darkness of the chocolate (% cocoa), the size of the dog, and the amount consumed are important factors in whether toxicity will occur. I would definitely be worried if a Maltese ate a full block



of dark baking chocolate! The signs are similar to caffeine overdose, since the active ingredient (theobromine) is the same as in tea. Increase in heart rate and body temperature, agitation and even muscle tremors and seizures can occur within 4-6 hours after consumption.

Grapes and raisins produce kidney disease in some dogs, but not all. Signs would be non-specific and include lethargy, loss of appetite, nausea and/or vomiting.

Macadamia nuts produce a unique syndrome in dogs. Dogs can get sick within 12 hours – signs are weakness, wobbliness, increase in body temperature, vomiting and pale gums. Dogs can return to normal with symptomatic care in 48 hours or less.

Bread dough ingestion produces an interesting combination of problems. In addition to the discomfort of eating a large amount of dough that expands, the warm environment of the stomach allows for fermentation and release of ethanol. Ethanol toxicity is comparable to anti-freeze poisoning which causes kidney failure. Signs can be seen between 30 minutes to 2 hours after ingestion. This would definitely be considered an emergency.

As with any issue relating to your pet's medical care, it is best to call your veterinarian when questions arise.

Dr. Mona S. Miller lives in Lafayette with her 3 year old son and her yellow Labrador Retriever. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to [MonaSDVM@aol.com](mailto:MonaSDVM@aol.com).