Winter Wonderland

It's that time of year again when our furry companions need a little extra care during the colder winter months. Icy sidewalks and driveways, snow and ice-melting chemicals on the ground and bitter cold temperatures are just a few examples of potentially hazardous conditions for our beloved pets. Although your pet may not be complaining about the dropping temps or is too busy having a blast playing in the snow, it is still important to take the necessary precautions.

**Tips for keeping your pets happy and healthy this winter season:**

1. If your pet spends most of the time outdoors, consider bringing him/her indoors during the freezing months.

2. If you must keep your pet outdoors be sure to provide a warm, dry and draft-free shelter outside. Often, your pet’s fur coat isn’t enough protection alone against the winter elements.

3. Since outdoor animals eat more during the winter to keep their energy up and stay warm, make sure there is plenty of food available for them. Likewise, keeping a bowl of fresh water out is critical in maintaining your pet’s health.

4. Indoor pets conserve energy by sleeping more and exercising less in the winter. Because of these different dietary needs, food portions may need to be adjusted accordingly to avoid weight gain.

5. Frostbite can be a serious problem during winter, especially for paws, noses, tips of tails and ears. Special booties, coats and hats can help keep your pet warm during outdoor activities in the cold weather. Booties are great for keeping hard snow and ice out of the spaces between their toes, which can sometimes be very painful. Trimming the fur in between their pads can also help keep your pet’s feet drier...along with your carpet!

6. Antifreeze (Ethylene Glycol) can leak from a car’s radiator and is the worst of all the wintertime chemical spills. It can be extremely deadly if consumed. Due to its sweet taste dogs and cats are often attracted to antifreeze, making it all the more essential to keep pets away from such chemicals. All radiator leaks should be thoroughly cleaned up as well.

7. Different types of salt (typically calcium or sodium chloride) are often used in the winter on sidewalks and roads to melt snow/ice and keep it from refreezing. This salt can be very harsh on your pet’s delicate paws. If your furry friend isn’t too keen on wearing booties, it’s a good idea to clean your pet’s paws regularly with warm water after being outside.

8. During winter cars are particularly “attractive” to animals, especially chilly cats who love to climb up under the hood and curl up on the warm motor. Always a good idea to tap on your car’s hood before starting it up just in case there is an extra little passenger on board.

**Winter Chemicals**

Chemicals such as snow/ice melt products and antifreeze can get onto our pets’ unprotected feet, where the chemicals can irritate their skin or get into small abrasions in their foot pads. It is also common then for animals to lick the chemicals off their paws, which can lead to gastrointestinal issues. Although new pet-friendly alternatives have been created for this reason, not everyone uses them. It is always a good idea to be mindful of this and that even the newer pet-safe products still have a degree of toxicity. Be sure to keep all chemicals away from pets. If you suspect your pet has consumed chemicals, the best thing to do is promptly call your veterinarian or local emergency animal clinic.
Holiday feasts are right around the corner and with that comes our furry friends eager to join the party! It can be tempting to fix them a plate so they can eat to their heart’s content, enjoying the holiday meals and treats along with us. While moderation is essential, it’s a good idea to check with your veterinarian about feeding your pet human food before letting them indulge. In terms of home cooking, you know what food your pet has done well with in the past. Remember too that holiday fare is often different, including more specialty items, from food that is made during the rest of the year. Although your pet might be ready to chow down, certain spices and ingredients may not sit well with your pet’s stomach. Never a bad idea to mention the following to any house guests as well, watching out especially for the little ones on the move with food.

Here are some tips for a safe holiday season:

The “OK” List:

1.) Turkey: Great source of protein, but make sure to remove any bones and excess fat and skin.

2.) Sweet potatoes: Containing very little fat, plain sweet potatoes are a yummy treat full of dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals for your furry critter.

3.) Cranberry sauce: This holiday favorite is safe for pets, yet can also be very high in sugar. Very small amounts are advised if given to pets.

4.) Pumpkin: Skip the pumpkin pie filling with added sugar and fat for your cutie and go for the real deal. Whether fresh, canned or dehydrated, pumpkin is a safe and healthy fiber source for both dogs and cats.

5.) Green beans: Great low-sodium and nutritious veggie! They aren’t harmful alone, but when mixed with other savory ingredients you have to be careful.

The “No” List:

1.) Avoid items that you know will upset your pet’s stomach: If your critter tends to have a more sensitive digestive system from past experiences, you should avoid new foods, especially in large portions or combined with other foods. Most of the “extras” we love just aren’t the best for our pets to consume. This includes butter, cheese, sour cream, onions and gravy, for example. Adverse reactions to food during the holidays isn’t fun for anyone!

2.) Don’t overwhelm your pet with a bunch of new things all at once: If your pet isn’t used to eating a variety of foods, trying too many items at once can easily overwhelm their digestive systems and may prove to be unsafe for them in the end. Small, non-spicy portions of food are best.

3.) Nothing with onions or other alliums (garlic, leeks, scallions): Though small, well-cooked portions of these ingredients can be okay if your pet is accustomed to them, but larger quantities can lead to toxic anemia.

4.) No chocolate: Chocolate causes abnormally high heart rhythms in dogs, among other problems. Dark and baking chocolate is especially toxic. All goodies and baking ingredients should be kept out of reach of pets.

5.) No grapes or raisins: Kidney failure in dogs can be caused by these items often when given in large quantities over a period of time. Not worth the risk!

6.) No xylitol: Although a lot of recipes don’t call for sugar substitutes, many diabetics may still need to cook with them. Deadly to dogs, this ingredient should be kept in a safe and secure place in your house away from pets. Sugar-free cupcakes, gums, and mints may also contain this product.

7.) No macadamia nuts: Unfortunately for dogs, this delicious snack can cause weakness, lethargy, vomiting, tremors and hyperthermia.

8.) No alcohol: As humorous as it may sound, watch where you set your holiday cocktail when curious pets are around looking for scraps. Definitely more susceptible to its toxic effects, alcohol is never a good idea for animals.