

The oyal Treatment Veterinary Center

Tips to Keep Pets Happy for the Holidays

Many people travel with pets, and many people have to travel without their pets. How can pet owners make sure their pets have a happy holiday too?

To board or not to board

Kennel: Some pets do well in a kennel because there may be more activities and they might be playing with other dogs, etc.

- Kennels do require certain vaccines. Check with your veterinarian about getting these done in advance of leaving so that you do not stress the animal with the vaccine at the same time as you stress them by leaving them.
- Don't over vaccinate – Vaccines stress the immune system and are not totally benign to the system. Often immunity lasts a good deal longer than we think, and many vaccines provide lifelong immunity. The Rabies vaccine is required by law. Use the 3 year vaccine if it is legal in your state. [After the first one-year Rabies vaccine, adult animals only need to be given the Rabies vaccine every 3 years in most states. This is because research has shown that once boosted, the rabies vaccine lasts at least 3 years.]
- Vaccine Titer Blood Tests: For vaccines other than the Rabies vaccine, most kennels know that they can accept blood tests to prove immunity rather than vaccination. Ask your veterinarian to do a vaccine titer blood test for Distemper/Parvovirus rather than give the vaccine.
- Bordatella annual or bi-annual vaccine (drops in the nose are best) is one vaccine that is typically required by kennels.

Home Care: Some animals do not play well with others and are happier to just be at home. Dogs or cats that are older, have health issues or are more nervous often do better when left in their own home with a caregiver to watch them. Do you have someone reliable that can stay with your pet at home?

- CATS: Unless your cat is used to travel or to a particular kennel, it makes more sense to leave cats in their own home if possible while you travel. If you are thinking of kenneling a cat, make sure to try it out before you go if possible.

Flying or Driving Long Distances with Pets

Air Travel in cargo

- Know requirements of the airlines for carriers
- Be careful about temperature and discuss temperature control with airline. Mid summer and mid winter are typically tricky in cargo.
- No Sedation for cargo travel. If you really need to sedate your pet to ride in cargo, you should think of a better way to travel with them. When animals are sedated, their thermoregulation capacity is diminished, and they are more likely to overheat or become seriously chilled. Cardiac or breathing health risks are also an issue. Sedated animals should be monitored continually, and by a health professional. Adverse reactions are not pleasant, and when you are traveling, help can be harder to find. Sedation in cargo is one of the leading causes of problems, and even death in traveling pets. Use gentle medications/herbs if you must to relax your pet for travel. Remember, most meds only last a few hours, and waking up from being sedated can be even more stressful if they are not home or back with you at that time.
- Discuss water availability and length of time for flight, tarmac time if there are connections, and if you can be with your pet between flights.

Car travel or in cabin air travel with a pet – Choosing a Safe and comfortable carrier/area for travel with your pet. Cats, and small dogs tend to travel better, and safer in a carrier. Having a cat jump in your lap at 55 miles an hour can be dangerous.

- Things to consider: soft sided vs. hard sided, ability to turn around in carrier, ability to see in and out, ability to hide, overall comfort, non-slip surface for floor of carrier, handles, wheels, back packs, strollers. There are many types and kinds, and most decisions will be based on what you and your animal need for traveling.
- Get your pet used to being in the carrier BEFORE you have to travel. Ways to make this area comfortable for a pet: Treats given daily in the carrier, putting toys and things that smell like home in it, sit by the crate with pet inside, then take them out. Put them in the carrier for increasing amounts of time while you are nearby. Once they are comfortable with this, leave them for a few minutes just to be sure they are okay with that.

Holiday foods/ dangers for pets

- The usual suspects – Chocolate, raisins, grapes, onions, foil wrappers, candy wrapping. Keep these out of reach. Remember to ask gift givers to let you know if there are any of these pet toxins, or any foods, in gifts you leave under a tree or on the floor where a pet could get to them.
- meats/poultry with bones, corn cobs – lots of leftovers from holiday feasts are dangerous for your pet. They cannot be easily digested by dogs once they are cooked. Cooked bones splinter more dangerously than raw bones and can cause GI perforation when eaten. Corn cobs are often swallowed whole and, while it seems like a great idea at the time, these typically cause life threatening obstructions and surgical removal is often the only answer.

- Always call your vet or the poison control hotline if your pet has ingested anything out of the ordinary. Sometimes it is good to induce vomiting, but with sharp objects, bones, or acidic or alkaline toxins, vomiting may be a very bad idea.
- **Tinsel** and other strand-like decorations can be health hazards to pets - especially cats. Pets may play with it but owners may not realize that they will eat it. These decorations can cause life threatening foreign body obstructions that can even cause GI perforation.
- **Mistletoe** is very toxic to dogs and cats. Make sure if you do have mistletoe, that pets don't have any access to it, or that it doesn't fall on the floor.

Pets as gifts

- Giving a pet as a gift to someone that is not a family member is rarely a good idea unless the recipient is expecting or has specifically discussed their interest in owning a pet at this time. While a pet may seem like a great idea in theory, owning a pet is a big commitment in time, money and effort. Make sure the recipient knows what they are getting in to. A pet is not like a pair of shoes you can return!
- Alternative ways to help someone get a pet for a holiday gift – offer to take the person to a shelter and help them choose their own pet. Or offer to buy supplies for whenever they do get their own pet.

Great gifts for your pet

- Give the gift of health – choose foods that support health for your pet. Make the commitment to your pet that you will feed them grain free, low carb, high-quality protein foods for the year. Try to avoid high heat processing and fillers and preservatives. Excellent food is a gift that can decrease vet visits, extend the quantity and quality of life and happiness for a pet.
- Choose treats carefully, give your pet treats and chew toys that are made only in the USA, are quality controlled and are not full of chemicals or foods that are not appropriate for them. The upset stomach (or in the case of the recent information on jerky treats, the life-threatening illness) you will avoid is gift enough for your pet. Often the best toys and treats are the most familiar, reliable and safe.