

## **!!!Lead Them Not Into Temptation!!!**

### **Why Christmas may not be such a good time for your Norfolk Terrier**

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#### **Why worry?**

The Festive Season is a particularly dangerous time for dogs, and more cases of ingestion of toxins and other potential nasties are reported around this time. Already we see one or two cases each week, and, very memorably, we saw three cases in one day recently. In almost all these situations the dogs had found the item when the owners thought they had it well hidden. One was a rack of 12 freshly baked chocolate muffins hidden on a shelf in the garage. Another, was a whole of grapes stolen from a shopping bag left on the kitchen counter.

#### **Why now?**

There is usually a lot more food around this time of the year (some under the Christmas tree, at nose level!), and we are sometimes too busy/distracted/tired/emotional/merry/intoxicated to notice that the dog can get to foodstuffs that could make it very ill or even cause its death. Young children and kindly old people sometimes feed the dog these dangerous food unknowingly.

The result can be a dog that is 'under the weather' to one dying with acute liver and kidney.

#### **What are the dangers particular to the Festive Season?**

- ≡ Chocolate. It is the Theobromine found in coco that is the danger. And it is the quantity of Theobromine that is consumed, which is crucial. Solid, dark chocolate (especially cooking chocolate) is the most dangerous of all, and the danger decreases as the percentage of actual chocolate decreases.

- ≡ Grapes and Raisins. The peculiar thing about this group of potential toxins is that it is not the grape or raisin that is poisonous, but a suspected fungal toxin on even one grape or raisin. We suspect that this toxin can survive cooking, so Christmas pudding and cake are off the menu. It is entirely a matter of bad luck if your dog eats one that is affected or not. And one is sufficient to cause death.
- ≡ Novel foods. This applies to anything your dog has not eaten before. If he or she has never eaten gammon before, and is fed some on Christmas day, it may be the first you know that your dog is allergic to pork. That, and the excess salt that may trigger a cardiac event in a case of marginal heart disease.
- ≡ Accidental consumption of a large volume of food. This may lead to vomiting or diarrhoea, or even impaction requiring emergency surgery.
- ≡ Eating the string and elastic bands from around chicken, turkey, and joints of meat. These are delicious to the dog, but can cause foreign body obstructions. This can manifest within hours or weeks, and can result in surgery and even death.
- ≡ Eating other foreign bodies like Christmas decorations, fluffy toys, items from Christmas crackers, and so on, can pose obvious danger.
- ≡ Electrocutation and electric burns. The electricity supply to Christmas lights are sometimes low to the ground and interesting to your dog. At worst it may cause death (especially if your dog already has a dicky heart), but more commonly it causes burn injuries to the mouth.
- ≡ Batteries. These can cause particularly bad injuries to the tongue. On several occasions I have had to trim away dead tissue from tongues. This kind of injury is more frequent in puppies.

## **What do I do?**

- ≡ Avoidance of these dangers is the absolute best strategy.
- ≡ When in doubt as to what is happening to your dog, be it a suspected toxicity or foreign body ingestion, get in touch with your veterinary practice.
- ≡ If you suspect that your dog has eaten grapes/raisins/chocolate, and the vet is unavailable, it is best to make him or her vomit as soon as you can – within the first 20 minutes is best. You can do this as follows: *Make up the most concentrated salt solution you can. You do this by dissolving as much salt as warm water would allow. This is called a saturated salt solution. Spoon or syringe around 5ml (for a terrier) into its mouth. Repeat in 10 minutes if he or she has not vomited. This vomit should, hopefully, contain the offending items of substances.* Be minded that this procedure can save your dog's life.

## **Conclusion**

This article is necessarily all doom and gloom. Fortunately, however, most people are sensible and their pets survive the Festive Season! Accidents do sometime happen, and it worthwhile knowing what the dangers are, how to avoid it, and what to do.

Have a lovely Festive Season holiday, and keep out of trouble!