

Beware: Easter Can Be Fatal to Your Animal Companion

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By Susan Dunn

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Things change when holidays come around, and Easter is no exception. New people come to your house with strange things, routines change, you get more tired, and pay less attention, and your animal companion may be exposed to a wider age range of people companions.

All these things can confuse your animal companion causing them to do things they ordinarily wouldn't do, and also bring harm to themselves.

Since it has been my fate to learn from experience, sometimes vicariously, sometimes straight-on, I'll include examples which I hope this article will keep you from having to experience.

1. Keep careful track of visitors' possessions.

People bring all sorts of things in their suitcases and purses, like nitroglycerine and sleeping pills. Keep purses and luggage up off the floor, and in the case of cats, closed and latched.

Or you'll end up at the vet's, as I did one year, when Thisbe smelled chocolate (Ex Lax) in my mother's suitcase and ingested enough to kill her, said the vet, who was surprised she survived.

2. Pay close attention to the Easter candy and other gifts.

CHOCOLATE IS A SPECIAL DANGER. IT CONTAINS THEOBROMINE WHICH IS POISONOUS TO ANIMALS.

People wrap food dogs can smell that you can't, but then again it doesn't have to be food. Chucky tore open packages of bath powder, perfume and bath salts as well. If you catch Fido nosing around, remove the package to somewhere safe.

3. Keep your animal companion on their regular regime and diet.

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Don't, like me, carve the lamb roast tossing the fat down to Shy Nell, then carry it in to the table, begin the feast, and have Shy Nell enter the dining room and proceed to vomit it all up, sending one of your guests to the restroom. Try working that into the dinner table conversation!

4. Protect your animal companion from new people and vice versa.

Guests can agitate and excite your pet so they get in trouble, do bizarre things, and also harm people.

There are people like me who don't know what they're doing, stick their hand in the bird cage to acquaint themselves with your Macaw, and ... "the Macaw uses its bill to score and then, in steel-cutter fashion, shear the nuts in two so cleanly that the cut surfaces resemble the work of a metal-cutting saw or laser ..." and it's ho-ho-ho, off to the emergency room we go.

5. Don't let your pet eat all gifts that are presented!

The houseguest from hell, I brought homemade dog biscuits for my relative's Labs, which they duly ate ... and we were all up all night as the dogs struggled with fulminating diarrhea.

6. If your animal is excitable, soothe him or her, or remove them if necessary, giving them a special place in the house where they can have quiet time.

7. Protect your animal from young children.

They can poke eyes, pull ears, plop down on stomachs, beat their backs with toys, and generally provoke the gentlest of dogs.

8. Guard against escapes!

Weejums who lived with us for a while, was always looking for his chance to escape, and the holidays were the most exciting time of the year for the little rascal. Oh the opportunities! If you have such a knave in your house, make sure they have their tags, and explain to the kids and to houseguests, to please take care about the front door.

9. Talk to your houseguests, who are more under your "control," and keep your eye out for your other guests.

Or your pet companion may end up with an injured tail and bad memories like Muff Tuff, who was sleeping near the rocking chair; or a temporarily injured paw like Stan-the-Man, who got stepped on by someone wearing bifocals.

10. Talk to your animal companion - with soothing tones when needed, but also clear commands, so they know the rules still apply.

Use visual "communication" as well, as your animal companion is deeply attuned to you.

BOTTOM LINE: You're busier and preoccupied, things change, it's a good time to stop and think, for

the safety of your animal companion. They're counting on you!

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Easter Candy Can Kill Your Pet!

By D. Marie Ratliff

For millions of families, the celebration of Easter includes Easter baskets filled with sweet treats galore — chocolate bunnies, marshmallow chicks, sugary jelly beans and snack-size versions of nearly every candy product imaginable.

As parents, we often warn our children "Now don't eat too much or you'll make yourself sick." At worst, a child who stuffs him or herself with chocolate may develop nausea and a stomachache.

But for our furry friends who get into the Easter goodies, "getting sick" may be the least of it. Many of the sweet treats mentioned above can actually be fatal to dogs, cats and other small animals (such as ferrets.)

As responsible pet owners, it's our job to protect our pets from harm. And though pet owners routinely give their companion animals human food, this is almost always a mistake.

Yes, many pets prefer to eat what we eat. Yes, household pets (especially dogs) really like sweet, sugary foods. And yes, it feels good to pamper Fido or Fluffy by giving them "just a little taste" of what we're having for supper. But many of the foods that humans enjoy can not only cause illness for your beloved dog or cat, they can even be fatal. And given how small a cat or dog is compared to a human, sometimes it doesn't take much.

Chocolate is one of the most deadly foods for pets (both cats and dogs; dark chocolate is worst, white chocolate has the lowest risk). It's not only high in fat (pets don't need lots of fat any more than humans do), it contains two nervous system stimulants, caffeine and theobromine. The fat can make your pet vomit or cause diarrhea — unpleasant, but usually not fatal.

But it's the stimulants that sometimes cause death. Theobromine is both a cardiac stimulant and a diuretic. A dog that ingests an overdose of chocolate may be fine at first, but will probably become excited and hyperactive within a few hours. It may pass large quantities of urine and become unusually thirsty. The theobromine will cause your pet's heart rate to accelerate or beat irregularly, either of which can cause death (especially with exercise.)

But it's not just chocolate that's the problem. All sugary foods can cause dental problems, lead to obesity, and contribute to diabetes in pets, too. So be sure to keep your stash of chocolate securely out

Beware: Easter Can Be Fatal to Your Animal Companion

of your pet's reach.

Children are notorious for sorting and trading candy, so make sure they don't leave candy laying around (or candy wrappers, either, which can cause choking)

And don't forget how flexible and persistent a pet can be when it smells something yummy in a trash bin or garage sack, either.

If you do have reason to think that your pet has gotten into the candy, call your vet and describe their symptoms. (Symptoms of chocolate toxicity are nervousness, vomiting, shaking, and overreacting to noises, touch, lights, et cetera.)

If your vet is closed, call an emergency vet center. If you don't have one of those in your area you can call one of the national animal poison control lines such as the Pet Poison Helpline: 1-800-213-6680. (There is usually a fee for this service.)

It is up to you to make sure that Easter candy and other dangerous foods are kept securely out of the reach of your household pets — so your whole family can enjoy the holiday!

For a free Pet Poison Hotsheet with lists of household foods, products and plants that are toxic for pets, plus emergency poison information, visit

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