

# Bay Hill Cat Hospital

## Client Education Series #6

### Holiday Hazards for Your Cat

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The holidays are a special time of year for you and your family. Once Halloween arrives, it is a bustle of activity through the new year. We hope this article helps you protect your cat and family during this busy time of year.

Halloween is generally considered a child's event. Who can resist the joy in a child's eye when they dress up in a costume and say "Trick or Treat"? Unfortunately, when the door opens, it also opens up opportunities for your cat to dash outside. Studies reveal that >75% of cats which escape, do not get reunited with their families. For this reason and to increase the chance of recovery, please verify that your cat has a **microchip** implanted and it is **registered** and the information is kept current.



Another major risk of Halloween is the exposure to chocolate. Granted, cats are generally much pickier than dogs when it comes to sweets, the risk does exist. The active ingredients in chocolate are methylxanthines, specifically theobromine and caffeine. These compounds stimulate the central nervous system, act on the kidney to promote diuresis and increase the contractility of cardiac and skeletal muscle. The type of chocolate and the quantity ingested will play a role in the severity of the clinical signs.

Keeping with the topic of foods during the holiday season, nothing is more important to your cat than providing a consistent, balanced diet. The feeding of bones is not recommended and keep access away from products containing raisins or grapes, which can lead to acute kidney disease, and xylitol, which causes insulin release which in turn causes hypoglycemia and possible liver failure. Cats are quite susceptible to the effects of alcohol due to their unique liver metabolism and many alcohol-containing holiday treats are attractive, especially those which contain milk, cream or ice cream (i.e. White Russian, alcoholic eggnog, Brandy Alexander). Ethanol is rapidly absorbed orally and signs can develop within 30-60 minutes.



During the holidays, plants are commonly given as gifts. All forms of lilies (kidney disease) and amaryllis (central nervous system) are the most dangerous. The others, mistletoe, poinsettia and holly, can cause various amounts of gastrointestinal irritation which generally respond to symptomatic therapy. All forms of potpourri, dried or liquid, can be harmful. Cats are exposed by accidental spills or contact and ingest the product through grooming which can result in severe oral, skin and eye damage. An alternative to potpourri may be the wax melters. Just be sure to keep your cat away from the electrical cord and hot wax.



Finally, the most common “plant” during the holiday season is the Christmas tree. In general, flocked trees are not much of a hazard to cats. All trees need to be secured to avoid falling over if the cat decides to climb to the top. Water should be changed daily or access blocked to prevent exposure to bacteria and plant by-products. The ingestion

of needles from real and artificial trees can produce signs of vomiting, inappetance, abdominal pain and depression.

After the tree is purchased, the next holiday hazard is exposed: decorations. Try to place fragile bulbs and decorations higher up on the tree to decrease removal and breakage and subsequent exposure to glass. Tinsel/ribbon should be avoided around



cats. It feels like grass in the cat's mouth and once the cat starts to chew on such material, it cannot stop. The actions of the gastrointestinal tract will continue to try and feed the material through and eventually, the bowel will become bunched up similar to when one is trying to pass elastic through a waist band. The result is a linear foreign body and the only way to resolve the condition is abdominal surgery and removal.

Finally, try to keep cats away to light cords and cover up electrical cords. Fortunately, the cat is not as inclined to chew on cords like the dog, yet the risk exists.

Miscellaneous holiday hazards include the ingestion of silica gel packs, glowstick liquid and medications. Aside from the side effects of particular medications, the other items may lead to mild salivation to gastrointestinal upset. Candles can be hazardous if the cat gets burned OR knocks them off of the shelf. Never leave a burning candle unattended and if you must, consider the flameless candle.

During the holidays, we quite frequently have visitors to the house and a change in routine. Remember from our earlier discussion, try to keep to a routine. It is recommended to plug in a pheromone diffuser 1-2 days prior to the arrival of company and verify your cat has a safe "zone" to assimilate to the changes in the cat's time. Try to provide a special place for your cat and special time to play, groom or participate in a favorite activity. Stay calm. In some cases, it may be best to board your cat.

From all of us at Bay Hill Cat Hospital, we wish you and your cats and family a safe holiday season. At this time of year, remember the blessings in your life and we will resume our talks in the New Year.