

Christmas for Pets

There is nothing quite like the sincere joy of welcoming an engaging puppy or inquisitive kitten into the family during our festive season. The new addition will be cute and adorable, of course, and hopefully some care will have gone into the choice of pet so that he or she remains part of the family for many years to come but there are hazards for your new addition that you should be aware of.

The first challenge for your pet is displacement.

Imagine yourself picked up and transported away from your cosy home, full of things you knew which included your mother, brothers and sisters and deposited into a loud, incomprehensible environment with bemusing sights, smells and sounds. Nobody there speaks your language except a cranky old Collie that gives you a cursory sniff and refuses to look after you thereafter, much less nuzzle and welcome you or a snooty Persian that throws you a disbelieving glance before stalking off to curl up on a high perch far out of your reach.

Talking quietly and playing gently with the new pup or kitten will help ease it into its new home. Allow them to explore at their own pace. Booming voiced Uncle Dave overly jolly on sherry or a rampant nephew Tim full of chocolate and high on sugar are not the ideal initial companions.

It gets better. Large two legged beings pat and cuddle you and enticing dishes of puppy food and saucers of milk appear out of the sky and are pushed under your nose. Naturally the urge to go follows and you gratefully create a puddle and small pile on the floor. Confusion descends as this natural act causes revulsion and your prompt removal to the frosty grass of the back lawn.

Anticipate the consequence of giving the pet food and drink and frequently place them wherever it is you would like them to go to avoid misunderstanding. Praise them when they do the right thing and assist them to get it right.

After the initial fuss, the two legs turn their attention to other things and the way is clear to go exploring. Lots of packages under the tree draw your attention and your nose tells you there is food in some of them. Ripping the paper draws more disapproval and so you go behind the sideboard and discover a small ball that flew out of a pulled cracker. Mmm might try chewing that, oops an adult swoops down and tries to remove it from your mouth, gulp, swallowed it.

Many things attract puppies in particular and their natural reaction is to try to chew it and possibly eat it too. Small balls, elastic bands, peach stones, toys from crackers, drawing pins and wads of wrapping paper have all been removed surgically from pets over the Christmas period and while you cannot watch them all the time, you can move things out of their reach or restrict their access to certain parts of the house.

Much discussion is taking place about whether the vet should be called for advice about the swallowed ball. Gives you the opportunity to sneak into the kitchen and

grab a turkey bone that is hanging over the rubbish bin. This pulls the bin over and chocolate wrappings and fruit peelings fall out. All smells sensational and your nose tells you there is more in the dining room.

Some of our favourite foods are toxic to pets and again pups will eat whatever smells good. Chocolate and grapes are poisonous and while onions are unlikely to be eaten raw, fried onions would be wolfed up by a hungry puppy. Also, please do not give your pet cooked bones.

Your new owner has decided to play it safe and call the vet for advice when some of the kids let off party poppers. WHAT IS THAT NOISE! Fear takes over and you scramble for cover. Hands reach for you as you hide under the sofa and tug you out just as a couple of aunts pull a cracker which frightens you silly again and the conversation with the vet expands beyond foreign body ingestion into loud noise behaviour.

Fireworks and any other loud bangs can frighten your new pet. Be sensitive to their reactions and try to avoid the situation in the first place, however if this is not possible, do not reward fearful behaviour by fussing or reassuring your pet. Your pet perceives this as praising his fear and it will only encourage more such behaviour.

If you have any concerns over anything your puppy or kitten has eaten, please phone for advice.