



Rutland Dog Training

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## **Christmas Considerations by Adam Beral**

*Last year a friend of mine lost her dog on Boxing Day due to some unknown poisoning. I always give my dog a portion of Christmas dinner as a treat, but this year I am really worried about inadvertently giving him something that might hurt him. What should I do? He loves his Christmas dinner so much!*

I am sorry to hear about your friend's dog. It is never easy to lose a beloved pet but on Boxing Day must have been terrible. The festive season is a wonderful time for friends and family to get together and enjoy each other's company and pets form an important part of this. However, the traditions and treats around at this time of year present more risks than usual for our four-legged friends.

Dogs do have a relatively bombproof digestive system and can cope with most things without too much problem. They also have a very quick vomit reflex (as most dog owners know all too well!) which has evolved alongside their scavenging nature to protect them from poisonous or rotting food. Nevertheless, our pet dogs are becoming more sensitive and very rich or unusual foods can cause them to have an upset stomach. I would not stop treating your dog to Christmas dinner, but perhaps limit it to only turkey and gravy. There are a few other important things all dog owners should be aware of at this time of year:

- ❖ Most foods that we count as treats are high in sugar or salt (the things that make our food so tasty!) Therefore if you are treating your dogs as well, their water intake is likely to increase. Be extra sure to have clean water readily available.
- ❖ Dogs are susceptible to salmonella poisoning too, so make sure that any meat you give them is treated with the same caution you would treat your own food.
- ❖ Do not be tempted to give dogs cooked bones. These are very prone to cracking, and the shards can easily embed themselves in a dog's throat or intestines. Small chicken or turkey bones are not suitable for pets at all.
- ❖ Alcohol is not suitable for dogs and can cause long-term liver damage much quicker than in humans. Note as well that tobacco is potentially fatal to dogs and although they are unlikely to smoke cigarettes, I have known many dogs that will try to steal cigarette butts from an unguarded ashtray!
- ❖ Some plants that are commonly found in homes at this time of year are poisonous. Most noticeably, poinsettia and mistletoe. Keep them well out of reach of your pets. Also small, swallowable items like baubles and other decorations should be kept out of reach of dogs, especially puppies.



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- ❖ Raisins, grapes, chocolate, onions, macadamia nuts and avocados are among a number of items which can be toxic to our dogs. I know over the years many of my dogs have had a grape or two to play with and suffered no ill effects but in susceptible animals it may only take six or seven raisins or grapes to be fatal.

Please be especially careful at this time of year. I wish all of you and your pets a happy holiday. Best wishes, Adam.

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