Holiday Ferret Safety

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

We want the holidays to be a happy time for you and your ferret, not a time for an emergency visit to your veterinarian. The food and decorations that make the holidays so much fun for us can be dangerous for your pet. We do not want this article to dampen your holiday spirits, but we do want you to be aware of the dangers and plan carefully to avoid these potential hazards.

Dangerous Holiday Foods

Holiday foods we enjoy cooking and eating can be a problem for your ferret.

- **Rich, fatty foods**, like gravy or grease, can cause problems ranging from stomach upsets to diarrhea.
- **Alcohol** can cause serious intoxications in pets, and many pets are attracted to it. Clean up glasses after holiday parties. Ferrets are often attracted by the sweet taste of drinks, especially eggnog.
- **Chocolate, coffee, and tea** all contain dangerous components called xanthines, which cause nervous system or urinary system damage and heart muscle stimulation. Problems from ingestion of chocolate range from diarrhea to seizures and death. Unsweetened baking chocolate and dark chocolate are the worst culprits, but all chocolate, fudge, and other candy should be placed out of your ferret's reach.
- **Bones** from fish, meat, or poultry can

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

cause problems if swallowed. Even small bones can splinter causing lacerations (tearing) throughout the intestinal tract. So, no matter how big or how little they are, be sure to keep bones away from your pet.

Remember, ferrets have an exceptional sense of smell – juices on plastic or aluminum foil left on countertops are very tempting. If ingested, the plastic or foil can cause choking or an intestinal obstruction.

To be safe, put away food immediately and pet-proof your garbage. Garbage contains all kinds of other hazards for your ferret such as plastic wrap and bags, 6-pack beverage holders that could cause strangulation, fat trimmings, bones, and pieces of ribbon or tinsel.

Feed your pet(s) before a party so they will not be so apt to beg or steal food.

Poisonous Plants

We all like making our homes more festive for the holidays. We enjoy the green foliage and colorful flowers of plants. Unfortunately, many of the plants we have in our homes during the holidays can be poisonous to pets. **Never** let your ferret chew or eat any of these plants:

- Holly
- Mistletoe
- Hibiscus
- Poinsettias

So when you brighten up your home, place these plants well out of your ferret's reach, or use artificial holiday plants.

Gifts Under the Tree

- **Edible items** left under the tree can be very tempting, and remember that companies often package pet gifts wrapped in ribbon. Make sure to remove ribbons or ties before you present gifts to your ferret. If played with and swallowed, yarn, ribbon, or string on gifts can cause intestinal obstruction, requiring surgery.

- **Perfumes and aftershaves** contain ethanol (alcohol), and perfume also contains essential oils which can be very toxic to ferrets if ingested.
- **Batteries** for toys or other gifts can be toxic and cause intestinal obstruction. Keep in a safe place until they are ready to be inserted in the gift.

Christmas Trees

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, how careful we must be. Christmas trees and their decorations can create hazards for pets.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

- **Place your Christmas tree in a stable stand**, and attach the tree securely to a window or wall with something like fish line. We have known others who have hung their tree from the ceiling! To keep pets away from the tree, it may help to use a Scat Mat. Even though you take precautions, make sure your ferret is always supervised when in a room with a tree.
- **Tree needles can be toxic and cause mouth and stomach irritation.** Even needles and the wire of artificial trees could pose a problem. Be sure your ferret is not chewing on branches or eating fallen needles.
- **Tinsel's** shininess is attractive to pets. When eaten, it can cause blockages, which often require surgery to remove. This year, think about leaving it off the tree all together.
- **Chewing on electrical cords** can cause problems ranging from burned mouths, to electrical shock to death by electrocution. Unplug decorative lights when you are not there, use pet-proof extension cords, and spray cords with a product such as Chew-Stop®.
- **Place ornaments that are shiny, or could be swallowed or broken high up on your tree.** Larger, less intriguing ornaments can go near the bottom. Sharp ornament hooks can also become imbedded in your pet's mouth, esophagus, or paws.
- **Decorating trees with food is asking for problems.** Candy canes and gingerbread people can be as enticing to your pet as they are to children. We know of one diabetic dog who ran into some difficulties regulating her disease because she was stealing candy canes off of the tree; ferrets may try this, too. Popcorn, raisin, or cranberry garlands are beautiful, but can cause an obstruction when eaten, requiring surgery.
- **Tree preservatives are often sugar-based** (and inviting to pets) and because the water stands so long, the water in the tree stand often harbors potentially harmful bacteria. Fertilizers, insecticides, or flame retardants that were used on the tree may also get into the water. Cover the stand with a tree skirt or use other means to prevent access to the water.

Visitors

Some ferrets love visitors and behave very well. Others may be fearful or aggressive. If your pet tends to be fearful around strangers or in crowds, make sure he has a quiet room, away from the commotion, with water, food, and a litter box available. This will help timid ferrets be more comfortable. When inviting visitors, make sure they know you have a pet. If these people have allergies, you could help them by using a product such as Nature's Miracle to decrease the dander in the house.

Pet Gifts and Treats

When choosing a holiday gift for your special friend, be sure it is safe – no small pieces that could come off and be swallowed. Choose healthy holiday treats for your ferret and give them in moderation.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

With all of the festivities, do not forget to relax and spend some quality time with your pet. Your ferret will think that is the best gift of all.

The following products may be helpful to have on hand over the holidays:

Nature's Miracle
for Allergy Relief

Ferret Bites
Treats

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*