



# Holiday Hazards



The holiday season introduces many hazards to your cat. The highest number of toxicities and exploratory surgeries are performed during this time of year. Here is a reminder of potential hazards to your cat during the winter and holiday season.

**Antifreeze** smells and tastes sweet to cats – they will readily lap it up if given the opportunity. Unfortunately, ethylene glycol (antifreeze) poisoning is very serious, and if the cat is not treated immediately, will probably not survive. Very small amounts of antifreeze cause the kidneys to shut down and death to rapidly occur if untreated with special IV fluids. Be sure to completely clean up any spills and keep containers tightly capped.

Outdoor cats and kittens (especially strays) often sleep on **engine blocks** for warmth during the winter. Knock on your hood or honk your horn before starting your car in the cold months of winter. We have seen cats and kittens very severely burned and lacerated as a result, and they usually do not survive it.

Many **holiday treats** are toxic to cats. Alcoholic beverages, coffee, and chocolates rank high on the list of toxicities. Also, poultry/fish/pork bones can be very harmful to a cat by getting stuck in the throat and possibly puncturing the GI (gastrointestinal) tract. Also watch any potpourri around the house – this can cause GI upset and obstructions.

There are many species of **plants** that are toxic to cats, but a few are common during the holiday season. Christmas rose, holly, mistletoe, lilies (all types), philodendron and dieffenbachia are common holiday plants that can cause serious toxicities if ingested. Poinsettia is only mildly irritating to the mouth and GI tract and is not likely to cause a serious reaction.

Be sure to cover or tape down all **electrical cords**. Cats love to chew cords and wires (as most of you have probably experienced) and can come to very serious and painful injury from this behavior. Electrical burns and ulcers in the mouth and on the tongue result from electrocution. Sometimes more serious injury can occur, depending on the type of cord and voltage.

Keep all **tinsel, ribbons, and yarn** away from cats. It may be cute to tie a piece of it around your cat's neck in the spirit of the season, but it's not so cute when you're at the hospital having the cat anesthetized for a full abdominal exploratory surgery to find the foreign body obstruction in the GI tract caused by the decoration. Put tinsel high enough up on the tree that it can't be reached by pets, or just don't use it at all if you think the cat is particularly interested in it.

**Glass ornaments** can be hazardous if broken and the pieces are ingested. Very serious lacerations of the mouth, throat, and GI tract can result from this. Use glass decorations with caution.

**Batteries** contain corrosives that can ulcer the mouth and GI tract if chewed on. Don't leave them lying around where kitty could play with them.

**Read warnings** on the packages of decorations – such as spray on snow. Some of these products may be toxic if swallowed and should be avoided.

Keep kitty out of the **Christmas tree water** if you have a live tree. The water may contain additives such as fertilizers or preservatives that can cause GI upset in cats. Also, it's a perfect breeding ground for bacteria which can infect your cat. If kitty insists upon drinking out of it, try placing an e-collar (the cone-collars placed on animals to discourage licking or scratching) around the tree bowl so kitty can't get to it.