

Christmas with your Canine Companions

With all the excitement, Christmas can be a very hectic time with the rush of getting ready during the build-up to the day itself. So it can be easy to overlook what your dog is up to. With so many changes to the normal routine, it's not just puppies that can reach a new level of naughtiness, older dogs can get up to mischief with an incident or two or even come to harm. The Christmas tree festooned with fairy lights, baubles and decorations can present a very tempting chewing experiment, the fairy lights flex can somehow manage to get itself tangled in the dog's legs. A wagging tail can send decorations and candles flying. An unsupervised dog may decide to help himself when he finds bowls filled with nuts, sweets and chocolate. An inquisitive dog may be tempted to open presents left under the Christmas tree which definitely were not meant for him.

The festive table all ready for the Christmas meal looks splendid. The table cloth draped over the sides is just so tempting to pull as he walks by. Then there are the Christmas cracker novelties which always end up on the floor under the table, these may seem like a bite size edible treat to your dog. Holly berries fallen on the ground could be picked up and eaten: these along with chocolate, grapes, certain nuts, the Christmas Poinsettia plant are extremely toxic to a dog if eaten. Christmas cake and mince pies must be well out of reach of the opportunist dog who decides to grab himself a treat as dried fruit especially raisins can be fatal if ingested by a dog .

A busy kitchen and excited dog trying to see what you are doing is not a good combination. So be careful to keep everything out of reach from your dog. Sharp knives, hot pans, your dinner, even those meaty flavoured pieces of string may catch his attention, and later he may decide to investigate the bin to retrieve the turkey carcass. Cooked bones can cause serious damage to your dog.

Your dog is part of the family and of course you want him to join in the fun. Buying Christmas presents for him is great fun as there are many excellent doggy gift ideas available. But with so many specially produced Christmas toys and treats some are really not suitable for all dogs. Filled Christmas stockings should be chosen with care (see dogs and toys document) so extra supervision may be needed when your dog "opens" his presents. While you are enjoying your Christmas dinner keep your dog occupied and out of trouble by giving him Kongs stuffed with food. If you freeze them first it will take longer for your dog to empty. Make sure the Kongs are appropriate for the dog's size and chew strength. Try to keep to his usual routine as much as possible, but if you like to give your dog his own Christmas dinner; vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower, potatoes with a small amount of lean meat can be given in moderation. Avoid fatty salted or dairy food. Remember any change in your dog's normal food can cause an upset tummy, which over Christmas is no fun for anyone. However busy you are make time for his

walks and exercise especially before you all sit down for your Christmas dinner. Bored dogs are more likely to get up to mischief.

If your dog appears overwhelmed with so much going on, provide somewhere comfortable that he can get away from it all undisturbed when he chooses. For dogs that are likely to cause a bit of Christmas chaos especially puppies keep decorations, food or anything you don't want chewed, eaten or knocked over well above dog level. BE AWARE OF WHERE HE IS AND WHAT HE IS UP TO. A few sensible precautions will make sure the festive fun can be enjoyed safely. After your dog has finished playing with all his new toys, the present he would really like is a nice walk with you. So put down the chocolate, uncurl yourself from the settee (put on the new Scarf / Gloves/ Socks!) and enjoy some time with your special four legged Companion.

Merry Christmas, Gill Ward M.I.A.C.E