

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 12/3/2019

Nick Rusch:

And it's time once again for Pet Talk with our friend, Dr. Marty Greer from Veterinary Village of Lomira. Doctor, good morning. How are you?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. Thanks.

Nick Rusch:

Fantastic. Well, here we go into the holiday season and there's about eleventy zillion things that can harm our pets as we get close to this time of year and they are bound and determined to get in each and every one of them, aren't they?

Dr. Marty Greer:

They are and it's their full time job. They sit around the house 24 hours a day just wondering what you left out that's new and interesting. So they're always on the prowl taking a look for changes in their environment and investigating those.

Nick Rusch:

What is the most dangerous thing? I mean, we can take a look at, and there's a million things here, whether we're talking about turkey and chicken bones to the tree tinsel. What do you see in your practice that's the worst thing that they get into?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Electrocution.

Nick Rusch:

Really? From the lights, they chew on the lights?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, you got it. So you put out the tree, it's interesting, it's new, and then you plug in a string or multiple strings of lights and a lot of these are young dogs or cats actually, we've seen it in kittens as well, where the cord is running across the floor, running across part of the room that they've never seen it before. It may be white, it might be green. It doesn't really matter what color it is. I've got some that are red and white striped because gee, let's draw real attention to it. And then they go over and take a look and take a chew on it and very, very quickly, as soon as they bite into the cord, they're electrocuted and there's really no returning from that.

So I want people to take this one thing very seriously and how they set up their home for holidays is either put the cord someplace where they can't reach them and they can get into places you don't think they can, so you've got to be particularly creative. The other alternative is those nice corrugated cord covers that you can purchase at the electronics department in most of the stores or online and you can just run your cords through those so that they're secure, they're safe, they're covered. And then if they are chewing on the corrugation, they're not going to be able to get to the cords, you're going to be aware that there's a problem.

The chewing deterrent sprays frequently are not deterrent enough for them to be leaving the cords alone and last year we did actually have a young dog, about 11 month old puppy, that chewed through a cord. They lived in the Appleton area and before they could get to the referral center in Appleton, it was too late. It just happens that fast. So I think that is the one most serious gravely serious thing that we can see happen to our pets this time of year.

Nick Rusch:

That is just heartbreaking and the thing about it, honestly, until you mentioned it, this is something that would never have occurred to me, ever.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and unfortunately, it's not that people are careless, it's just the very same thing you described is it just never occurred to them that would be attractive to their dog. What would make them want to chew on a cord? Like why is that interesting? And I don't really know what the answer to that is other than I can tell you that it's happened many times.

One of my current staff members had a young cat, a kitten, under her parent's bed one night chewing on a cord and electrocuted itself and her dad reached under the bed and grabbed the cat out. Of course, then he got shocked as well. So it's really a big deal. So I want people to take it seriously and be proactive and not wait until they have a problem because all it takes is one accident, one chewing through the cord and it really changes your whole holiday season.

Nick Rusch:

Well, I guess so. Now, this begs another question, because I guess we have to take the same sort of care then when we talk about outdoor decorations and lights strung out outside as well for when our pets are outside?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is but I think outside, there probably are more interesting things to do. I haven't seen it in the outdoor pets and the other thing is the cords that you run outdoors tend to be a heavier cover on those cords, they're rated differently. So I still think you should take a look at that and many of the pet type of plugins, they make pet beds and they make pet water heaters that can keep your pets, if you have outdoor cats or outdoor pets that need to have a heat source or a source of water that's not frozen. Many of those have a coil of metal around them to protect the cord so that again, the pets are not likely to chew through it because those are meant for pets and people know pets are going to be in that environment, so the designers of those products automatically just surround the cord with a metal coil.

So that part is a lot safer, but it tends to be the indoor, those little thin, low voltage lights that we have. Those cords are very, very thin and really, I mean, they're great because they hang in the tree without extra weight and they're lovely and they're really pretty, but they're really dangerous.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah and there's nothing to them, as you say, they can get through them in no time.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. One bite. You don't even have time to run over there and get to them. One bite and it's already too late.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, it's over. Okay. What about other things? I mean, now that we're thoroughly depressed.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know, that's the problem. I don't want to make people sad.

Nick Rusch:

No, but you do want to be vigilant. You don't want to be sad. So you're performing a public service, Doctor, we appreciate that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Okay good, because I don't want them to think, "Oh, the holidays are... She's just all Grinchy."

Nick Rusch:

No, no, no, but it's one of those things where it's like you say, it's something that may not have occurred to you and you certainly want to be... Forewarned is forearmed, as they say.

Dr. Marty Greer:

You got it. So the other things, mistletoe is not used as frequently as I think it used to be and mistletoe is toxic, but poinsettias have a bad reputation for being toxic and they're actually not. So poinsettias are safe to put in your home around your pets. We don't encourage them to chew on the leaves and the flowers but they are actually not toxic. So those are safe to put in the house. You can give those as gifts to people that have pets. Those are nice. And a lot of people with pets also like to have plants, they're just that kind of, I want something alive in my home kind of person.

So we see a lot of plants in households with pets, but those are the ones to be aware of is Poinsettias are safe. Mistletoe is not. Mistletoe is the one you hang in the doorway. Poinsettias are the tall ones with the red or the white or the variegated leaves. I actually saw a blue and yellow one last year for Michigan, but that's a whole nother discussion. So they do come in different colors. And then a lot of people put gifts of candy and nuts under the tree. They may wrap them. They may not. So everyone knows that the darker the chocolate, the more toxic it is. So the milk chocolates tend not to be as toxic but still not encouraged for consumption by our pets. Darker chocolates, the darker the chocolate, the higher the cacao content, the more dangerous that is.

And we also know that macadamia nuts and raisins, which are frequently served with the chocolate candies, are toxic to dogs. So we want to be really careful with the chocolate covered raisins or any kind of a macadamia nut product. Those are toxic.

Nick Rusch:

Now what about other nuts? I mean macadamia, they are particularly toxic for some reason and it's easy to-

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, that's the only one.

Nick Rusch:

It's easy to avoid them because they're really expensive.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Isn't that the truth like, "Oh no, I can't do that."

Nick Rusch:

Yeah, go with the cashews.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly, they're much, much more affordable. And we've had people wrap those gifts and put them under the tree or get them as gifts and not realize that they may be candy or food, put them under the tree and when you're at work or at home or in the shower or in bed or whatever, you aren't doing the other 23 hours a day besides watching your dog, then the dog is over there, checking out what's under the tree and sniffing around and going, "Oh, this smells pretty tasty."

So they'll rip open the wrapping paper, rip open the box and then consume it. The other part of course is if they eat the packaging of the chocolate and we've seen that, especially when there's foil wrapped candies, they'll eat the foil wrapping as well as the chocolate and those can cause obstructions. They're not toxic per se. And then of course there's the sugarless candies that contains xylitol. The other sweeteners don't seem to be a problem, but xylitol is a particular problem and we see a couple of cases of that a year.

Just had one last weekend. So those are the sugarless gums and candies that you may want to purchase for your children so that they don't get all that sugar and all the calories that go with it. But the xylitol in those products, number one, will drop the dog's blood sugar. It doesn't seem to affect cats as profoundly. Drops their blood sugar to a dangerous

level where they'll start to have a seizure or at least become weak and uncoordinated and if they eat even more of it, then they'll end up with liver failure. So that does require several days in the hospital on fluids with a pretty high level of care.

So be aware of those. Kids leave those in their backpacks and leave them laying on the couch and things like that. Not meaning of course, to hurt the dog or to let the dog get into them. We had one child that wrapped the sugarless candy into a blanket so that when she went to bed, the dog couldn't find it. Well, guess what? The dog had eight hours of sleep time that the kid was sleeping, the dog was not. So he found it and it is a really common toxicity and one that is relatively new because xylitol is a fairly new sweetener on the market.

Nick Rusch:

That's incredible. So you're trying to be healthy. You're trying to make a healthy choice to go sugarless and here come to find out that for at least one member of the family, it's not a healthy choice.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, exactly. It just doesn't seem fair, does it?

Nick Rusch:

No, it doesn't.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Everything you try to do, there's a consequence.

Nick Rusch:

Exactly. There's something, unforeseen consequences. Well, now you'd mentioned the tinfoil wrapping. I would guess the same thing applies when we start talking about items like tinsel.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and tinsel, along with things at other seasons, like Easter grass, those long skinny pieces of product, they're again, very appealing. They glitter, they're interesting. Kittens in particular will eat long, skinny things like tinsel. Puppies tend to eat less of that. The other thing are the cellophane wrapped candy canes because again, we can hang those on our tree and those are fascinating. So cellophane can cause a blockage as can tinsel and like I said, Easter grass, but that's not the season that we're in.

So anything that's long and skinny and not digestible, can get into the GI tract and cause an obstruction. My mother-in-law actually ended up with a cat that was surrendered to the veterinary clinic where I was working because she had eaten cellophane and the client didn't want to pay for the surgery. So it is not an inexpensive surgery to do. You've got to go in and remove those pieces of tinsel or cellophane.

Now, if you see your dog eat sugarless gum or candy or chocolate or foil wrappers or tinsel or any of these other things that we've talked about other than the electric cord, if you see the dog or cat eating on those, then the time to address that is immediately. If you go straight to the veterinary clinic and have vomiting induced, most of those can be taken care of without going to surgery, but it needs to be done very quickly. It shouldn't be something that you say, "Well, let's wait a couple of days and see what happens" because I can promise you what will happen. We know the outcome is going to be unfortunate. So don't wait, you want to go straight to the veterinary clinic. If we're open, your veterinary clinic is open you go in, you get an injection of a drug called Apomorphine.

It's a morphine derivative that has this lovely side effect of inducing vomiting and works really great, but you need to do it in the first hour or two after ingestion, before the product starts to move out of the stomach and into the intestines. If you're a veterinary clinic, isn't open, of course the referral centers is Appleton, there's Milwaukee, there's Madison, there's Grafton, there's Port Washington.

Within an hour's drive of pretty much everybody in our area there's going to be an emergency or referral center that's available that will have Apomorphine and can induce vomiting. And I will tell you that office visit for that and the

injection of Apomorphine is much less expensive than going to surgery for thousands of dollars. So spend a hundred or two and get it taken care of.

And the old information online about using hydrogen peroxide to induce vomiting is pretty dangerous. I've seen very dangerous outcomes from that. I've seen cats develop gastric ulceration that are fatal. I've seen a dog throw an air embolism into her brain. So those are things that you don't want to do at home. There is no do it yourself kit at home. Ipecac is no longer on the market, so you want to go in and get the Apomorphine by your veterinarian and you can go straight in and they'll see right away. If you called and said, "We have an ingestion, this is our concern." Poison control can help you with toxins, but they won't help you with aluminum foil and tinsel because those are not toxins that their toxicologists are trained to take care of.

But all of our veterinarians are trained. Every veterinarian that I know has seen dogs and cats eat things that they never thought they would. So we're all pretty good at this because it happens a lot.

Nick Rusch:

Right. Chances are you're not the first in any of these cases.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm going to tell you, I've seen just about anything that can go down a dog's gullet. If it's smaller than their head, they'll fit it down their throat and if it can go down, we've probably seen it happen. Everything from underwear to remote controls to diamond rings can go down and it's profoundly interesting to me what dogs will swallow. There's always information on the internet about dogs that swallowed a knife. I mean, it's just unbelievable what dogs will do because they don't have really good judgment. They don't understand the consequences. If it tastes good, they're going to try it and even if it doesn't taste good, they're going to probably try it anyway.

So there's a lot of things that they'll ingest and you just need to puppy proof your house and then, like I said, react quickly if there is something that's ingested so that we can get that taken care of and not have to go to surgery.

Nick Rusch:

I believe that David Letterman told the story, and he didn't tell him with any glee because he loved his dogs, but I don't remember if it was Bob or Stan, but one of his dogs ate a creosote fireplace log, ate most of one. Letterman came home and he thought of all the things for the dog to get into and the results were extremely unfortunate, but just the fact that this, I mean, come on, really? You just...

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know. What tastes good about creosote and it's very toxic because of the chemicals.

Nick Rusch:

Of course, yeah. He had no chance. I mean, man alive, wait for the Kibble, but they don't.

Dr. Marty Greer:

No and that's the other thing is the dog will eat the entire bag of Kibble. They'll eat an entire box of dog treats. So again, those are things that if you leave dog treats under the tree, the dogs will eat them. And I've actually had multiple clients tell me that they saw this wonderful box or plate of cookies and they tried one of them and it turned out that they were dog cookies, so they immediately realized that they didn't taste nearly as good as they should have. So people will do things they shouldn't as well. Heaven help us, don't eat the dog cookies. I mean, it's safe. It's safe, there's nothing poisonous in a dog cookie, but it probably isn't going to be as tasty as you're hoping for.

Nick Rusch:

But that guy, in his defense, Doc, that guy's coat was so shiny.

Dr. Marty Greer:

The one I remember was pretty bald, but that's another story.

Nick Rusch:

What about anything else we should be concerned with this time of year, Doc, whether it's holiday related or just weather related this time of year for our pets?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, being outside, we need to make sure our pets are not out and in whether that's either too extreme for their feet, for their wellbeing. If you think it's too cold for your outdoor dog or your outdoor cat to be outdoors. If you think it's that cold that you're calling the vet clinic asking the question is, yes, it's too cold. So they should either move into an area that's small and confined. If you put them in a great big barn or a great big garage without any way for them to heat a small area with their body heat, they're going to be colder. But like I said, you can buy mats. There's a company that sells a heated mat and a heated cat protection, little house, and all kinds of devices that you can buy at the store. You can go to Fleet Farm and pick up these kinds of items, they have them in the pet department.

They will help keep your pet warm and you need to make sure they have access to water. In this cold weather, of course, everything freezes pretty quickly and the colder it gets the faster it freezes. When it gets to zero and below the water freezes practically before you can get back into the house. So you want to make sure that you're putting out warm water and then replenishing it frequently enough that your pets get access to water. If they don't, then they're going to start to drink other sources of fluid and those can be things like antifreeze because of course antifreeze doesn't freeze and that again is a toxic product that will cause kidney failure within about three days and it again is a really tragic outcome to an unfortunate situation.

So just be really vigilant that you've got your pets where they're protected from the wind, protected from the snow. Warm enough that they're comfortable in a small area that they can heat with their body heat and access to plenty of fresh unfrozen water. If they have to drink water that's nearly freezing and they're already cold, that's just going to chill them further. So be thoughtful about that. Bring them in and say, if you need to, bring them into the basement or some other part of your home that it can be safe for them to be in but still comfortable.

So basically... Oh, the other thing that I've seen before and it's happened to me at my own house twice, is knocking over the Christmas tree. That's another really popular activity. You get a cat, a young cat that sees the tree and sees it as a new place to go exploring and climbs up the tree or a dog with a big old swishy tail that comes running through the living room and it's very excited about all the things that are happening and all the new people that are coming over and the tree goes right over.

So at my house, when I put up a tree, I tether it to a ceiling plant hook with just a small piece of wire. You can still decorate the tree, can still put a tree topper on. You can still work around it, but it helps to have not only a large base for the tree, but then a place to secure it to the ceiling. My husband knocked the tree over one time. The dog knocked it over the other time. And those breakable ornaments, those go down pretty fast. So I try to be really careful with placing breakable ornaments on the tree in a place that is the tree does get hit with a wagging tail or gets knocked over that you're not going to have a big crash of glass and then again, another hazard for you to try to clean up while the dog is over there helping you and walking around in the glass, that's broken on the floor.

So Christmas is... You put all these really interesting new things out and it's exciting and it's interesting to you. It may not be as exciting and interesting to your pets. Some cats will start to urinate inappropriately if you block their favorite window with the Christmas tree. So they'll start to go over and mark territory. So Christmas is just fraught with all kinds of scary and interesting things and I want it to be safe and fun for everyone in your family. So with a little bit of forethought, it can be really well done.

Nick Rusch:

Wow, I had not considered the marking of the territory. I was going to ask you a question about how you, because I know that you have several dogs, I was going to ask you about how you keep... You decorate the top half of the tree, or have you had them all in pretty good shape now that they know what's going on?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, I put candy canes on the bottom half so that if they get into it, it's not going to hurt them and the other ornaments that I really preserve and the family heirloom ornaments, those go at the top where the dogs can't get to them.

Nick Rusch:

That makes perfect sense, and you've the same thing if you have small children. You need to keep them breaking my ornaments. Up high, where they can't reach. Doctor, it's all good advice.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And then a few bells. A few bells on the tree, too.

Nick Rusch:

It's all good advice and it's all good information and if something unfortunate does happen this holiday season or something minor happens and we want to take good care of our dogs and cats, where do we go?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, you can see us at Veterinary Village. Our website is smallanimalclinic.com. So it's pretty easy to spell or Veterinary Village. Our phone number is 920-269-4000. We're at the corner of Highway 41 and 49, just south of Fond du Lac. So easy to find, easy to get there. We are open 362 days a year. We are closed on Christmas Day for anything other than reproductive emergencies. So otherwise the staff needs to have a little bit of time off, but we are there evenings Monday through Thursday til eight o'clock on weekends, including Sunday afternoons. So if you have a question or concern, visit the website, our Facebook page, or you can give us a call and come down to visit us.

Nick Rusch:

Fantastic. Doc, we always enjoy talking to you. It's always such a kick. We always learn a lot and it's a great way to find out information and take better care of our pets. You're just the best. Thanks so much. Have a great day.