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Your dog may be on Santa's nice list, but only you can use these safety tips to keep your pet healthy and happy during the Christmas holidays.

Written by [Caitlin Ultimo](#) ✓



Get your dog into the holiday spirit with a Santa hat. *Gina Cioli/I-5 Studio*

Bells jingling, stockings hung and gifts wrapped – Christmas is on its way! My dogs may not be fans of most things associated with winter like bone-chilling winds, freezing rain and snow, but they always seem to enjoy Christmas. Sure, it might have something to do with the pile of gifts they receive, but I like to think it's more than that.

To say my family consists of dog lovers would be an understatement, currently tallying 16 dogs between four households! On Christmas, we all get together, dogs in tow, to celebrate. My little guys run around in their holiday attire, greeting people and animals alike. By the end of the night they are exhausted – and so are we! Honestly, while the day makes for great memories it can also lead to a few headaches. Between all of the holiday hoopla it's not always easy to keep tabs on our pets. With a little planning and know-how, though, it is possible for a house that may have quite literally gone to the dogs to be a fun and safe environment for everyone.

To ensure a stress-free, safe Christmas day and night, Annie Angell, CPDT-KA and co-owner of [My Two Dogs](#)



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Holiday Prep

"Keep your dogs' routine as close to normal as possible. If you can, increase exercise time so they don't feel forgotten during the holiday mayhem," Angell says. Also consider creating a holiday-free space, where you keep your dog's things, like beds and toys.

Angell points out that with guests coming and going, pets sometimes can't resist the lure of an open door, which means you should prepare.

"Keep your dogs' updated ID on their collars and make sure their information on the microchip is current," Angell says.

Decking The Halls

Lights, the tree and chocolate all make for common Christmas hazards that require dog-proofing.

"In our house we tie the Christmas tree to the wall, don't use glass ornaments and pinch the hooks onto the tree branches so no ornaments can fall off or get taken off," Angell says.

Holly and mistletoe are two traditional Christmas décor go-tos that should be skipped when sharing your holidays with your pets. Holly can cause pets to suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, while mistletoe can cause gastrointestinal upset and cardiovascular problems.

Festive Fare

It may be tempting to share the holiday joy with your pet with a few holiday treats, but chocolate, raisins and other ingredients in your holiday cookies and meals can be harmful to your pet.

"Keep his diet the same," Angell says. "A little extra turkey or sweet potato is fine, but too much of a good thing will cause stomach upset and the problems that come with that."

You could also check out a few recipes that you can bake-up specifically for dogs, like gingerbread and peanut butter biscuits cut into festive shapes.

Gifts And Goodies

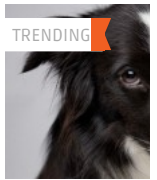
Your dog will surely love any gift you choose for him — just be sure you pick toys and bones that are safe and made just for dogs. Child toys may have pieces that can easily come off and be eaten and choked on. It's also a good idea to de-tag toys if you plan on wrapping them and letting your dog open the gift on his own.

Typically, I'm in charge of the dog toys for everyone. So I loosely wrap them, secured only with one piece of tape. The dogs get to open their gifts first so I do a mass drop and let each dog pick his own gift — it makes for some great pictures!

Christmas Games

Include your pet in a holiday play perfect for him. Angell and her family play a game she calls Find Your Gift.

"We take some dog toys and treats and wrap them up and place them among some unopened gifts, and



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[then we] tell our dogs to go 'find it' and watch them rip open the gifts to get to the toys or treats," Angell says. "Our dogs won't eat the wrapping paper, but we watch closely just in case. They love the ripping and shredding part as much as the actual gift."

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