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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!! BEWARE THE HOLIDAY DIET

We are rapidly approaching the holidays. As the season of fleas and ticks subsides with the onset of the winter months, veterinarians gear up for the medical problems most commonly associated with holiday festivities. As our taste buds yearn for the delectable's of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Chanukah, it's hard not to offer these treats to our beloved pets. The trouble is that the digestive system in dogs is not well adapted to the many variations in human diet. Let's explore the reasons why our foods cause diarrhea in so many dogs.

Diarrhea in dogs may result from any abrupt change in diet. This is because the normal bacterial flora that live in their gastrointestinal tract tend to accommodate to one or two usual food-types. When we suddenly change their food, it causes adverse effects on the normal flora. That is why any change in the composition of their diet should be made in gradual increments over a period of several days to allow for adaptation.

Numerous dogs are also intolerant of certain specific foods, such as lactose digested in milk, fatty foods, spicy foods, and food additives found in many commercial diets. Most dog owners are unaware that food hypersensitivity to beef and poultry protein sources has been implicated as a cause of chronic inflammation of the bowel in dogs and cats. In addition to our diets, a large number of commercial dog foods contain at least some component of chicken or beef.

Another major cause of diarrhea results from the indiscriminant eating and chewing behaviors typical of dogs. Such behaviors include overeating, ingestion of spoiled garbage or decomposing carrion, and ingestion of abrasive or indigestible foreign material (e.g. bones, stones, hair, plants, wood, carpeting, foil, plastic) that can traumatize the GI mucosa.

Fortunately, dogs with diarrhea caused by dietary indiscretion and scavenging often recover on their own with GI rest (by fasting or bland diet) and the use of commercial anti-diarrheal medications. If the symptoms become more severe, intravenous fluids may become necessary to treat dehydration.

Today's holiday message is that preventative medicine is the best medicine. Instead of inviting our dogs to feast off of our leftovers, go to your local pet shops and buy holiday treats that they are meant to eat. Pay attention to your vets when they recommend prescription diets or specific human food for specific medical reasons. Loving our pets doesn't mean treating them exactly the way we treat ourselves. Healthy and happy holidays to all of your household pets!