

## **Talking Turkey about Thanksgiving with a Dog**

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, plans for big gatherings of families and friends are in the works! While we love to include our pets in everything that we do, this can provide fabulous enrichment for our animals or, sometimes, it's a big source of stress. With any activities involving your dog, the question that needs to be top of mind is "am I doing this for me, or for my dog? Is this something that my dog WILL enjoy, or that I WISH my dog would enjoy?" There are a few things to take into account as you make plans for your family, your friends, your feast... and Fido!

### **Travel**

Many people travel long distances to reach the homes of family and friends. If that's in the cards for you, consider how your dog tolerates long car rides. What will your accommodation be like when you arrive? If you're staying in a hotel, be mindful that hotels often require dogs to be crated when left in the room alone. If you're staying with family, crating might also be a good option to keep your dog from getting into things in your host's home. Being left alone and crated in a new place, with new smells and sounds, is a really big ask for most dogs! If this isn't something your dog can do comfortably, have a Plan B. Setting up a video camera is the best way to find out how your dog manages time alone in the crate, so test this at home before a trip!

### **Home Invasions**

If you're not traveling, will you have a large number of people - even strangers to your dog - coming into your home? It's not unusual for a dog who welcomes attention from people in public to become testy when people enter their home. If this describes your dog, it would be ideal to find a boarding option for the day of the gathering. Your dog won't have fun at home and, if there's an incident, neither will your guests!

If your dog is very friendly, but easily excited when people enter your home, you can take steps to prevent happy hurricane greetings. Have a family member take the dog out for a long walk during the window of time that your guests are arriving. This will not only give your dog a chance to stretch her legs and get her jollies out, but it will also eliminate the excitement of the doorbell being rung repeatedly, the initial excited greetings between people, and the constant opening of the door. Once your guests are settled in the home, bring your dog back in. There will still be some excitement, though it will be much more manageable!

### **Party time!**

Even with the friendliest of dogs, parties can mean new and potentially stressful excitement. Many gatherings involve alcohol consumption and, along with that, strange

behaviour on the part of humans! Be mindful of how guests are interacting with your dog - even if they have the best of intentions, the disinhibition that comes along with drinking can result in less than respectful behaviour toward animals in the home. Likewise, excited or overtired children can push even the most tolerant dog's buttons. Active supervision, eyes-on and hands-on, is key to keeping all parties safe and happy.

It is tough for a dog to get an adequate amount of quality sleep when there's activity in the home, so this should be considered as you plan your party. Is there a person who also needs a break from the activity who can hang out in the bedroom while the dog naps? Many dogs can't settle if they know they are missing out on an activity, so perhaps the car would be a good place for a nap instead! Tired dogs are often grumpy, irritable, or hyper, and having trouble winding down is a common trouble for puppies and young adults in particular!

### Other Dogs

Before mixing multiple dogs into the gathering, consider whether your dog can share space and resources with new dogs in a potentially stressful situation. Where we might see a party with friends, your dog might instead see a stranger encroaching on their space and valued resources. If the invited dogs haven't met before, consider arranging several walks together ahead of time, to ensure that the dogs are compatible. If they aren't, you'll have time to make alternate arrangements. Pick up chews and toys if there's any question about whether sharing is a concern. Multiple dogs milling about the dinner table could brew trouble, so that is a good time to keep them separated.

### Dietary Indiscretions

Food is central to most Thanksgiving gatherings! Outside of specific food sensitivities, there are some important considerations around keeping your dog safe around the big meal. It's not a problem to share food in reasonable amounts, however eating a large amount of fat can cause a condition called pancreatitis - which is exceptionally painful! If your dog gets a hold of the turkey carcass and slurps up the fatty skin and bone, give the emergency vet a call right away - don't wait for symptoms!

Be proactive in managing your dog's access to not only the food, but also the cooking utensils - like the gravy pot or baking pan. Purchase a baby gate or X-pen to block your dog from the kitchen, particularly when the pots and pans are left unsupervised while you eat. These steps are especially important if your dog is a known counter-surfer!

Instruct your guests clearly on what your dog is allowed to have and in what quantity. Each person feeding a little bit might add up to a lot! Ask them not to feed any bone or fatty foods. If your dog has a sensitive stomach, you might even consider keeping her

on leash or crated beside you so you can be sure that no one is slipping her any illicit treats under the table. And of course, she can have her own food-stuffed toy to keep her entertained!

With a little bit of foresight and preparation, you can keep your Thanksgiving gathering fun and safe for your dog, you and your guests. Happy feasting!



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