

PetAssist®

Companion's Corner

Tips for keeping your pet safe and healthy this Fall

by PetAssist's consulting veterinarian, Dr. Charles Schwirck, DVM

As summer turns into fall, in addition to the changes in temperature, there are many changes in our lives that have effects on our pets' lives as well. We all need to be mindful of these changes to help keep our pets healthy and happy. For those families and others who go by a school-year schedule, this is a transitional time. Our pets, just like us, are creatures of habit and very easily get into a daily routine. Once that routine is changed, they also need a period of adjustment. Many pets experience separation anxiety to varying degrees and act out due to that anxiety. This may result in abnormal or inappropriate behaviors such as destructive behavior or inappropriate elimination. Some may have a change in appetite and even show signs of depression. Although most pets will adjust to the new routine as they do every year, some will take longer than others and we need to recognize and understand this so we can take precautions to keep our pets and homes safe. Although it is an age-old excuse for many students, there may be some truth in saying "the dog ate my homework," as this may be a result of their reaction to the change in schedules and routines. And these days, eating the homework may involve eating or destroying a smart phone, tablet or computer.

Of course, pets eating things they shouldn't is a year-round risk. But particularly with the separation anxiety associated with schedule changes, pets will get into garbage, steal bag-lunches, and get into the laundry that might be left on floors and in exposed baskets. Between all the good sweet corn that is around this time of year and the decorative corn that comes later in the fall, corn cob ingestion is a big problem for dogs. Corn cobs, when ingested (dogs can actually swallow them whole), can easily cause intestinal obstructions that often require surgical intervention to relieve. It's important to make sure all trash is secured and also watch larger pets (or even cats) that can reach counters and tables where food may be left out. Onions, garlic and common snacks like grapes and raisins are potentially toxic for dogs and consumption of these items should be avoided.

In some parts of the country, the cooler weather brings a resurgence of fleas and ticks. In the northeast United States, September is often a bad month for fleas and November for ticks. Even in the much colder weather, when we get a few warmer days, the insects are still active. It's important to continue to use whatever form of flea and tick control was used in the summer to protect our pets in all seasons.



Late October brings Halloween and, in addition to the decorations that pose an ingestion risk to our pets, there is the increasing presence of treats. Just like us, our pets can get upset stomachs from ingesting sweets and treats, and they are also at risk of toxicity from some common treats. Chocolate can be toxic to pets and should be avoided. Chocolate ingestion can cause anything ranging from an upset gastrointestinal tract to life threatening heart arrhythmias. Many sugar free products, most commonly chewing gum, contain the sugar substitute xylitol. Xylitol ingestion by dogs can cause rapid life threatening toxicity. Be extremely careful to avoid a pet's exposure to these and all types of candies and treats.

Fall is a wonderful time of year and, with a few precautions, we can keep our pets happy and healthy in this season and throughout the year.

