

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 12/1/2020

Nick Rusch:

It's Tuesday and time for Pet Talk Tuesday. Joining us via the telephone, Dr. Marty Greer, from Veterinary Village in Lomira. Dr. Greer, how are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

We're doing great. Thanks for asking.

Nick Rusch:

Good, good. Yes. Thanks for being with us this morning. And it's that time of year when I know the holidays always present some challenges for our pets. We've got more people in the house than ever before, even though a lot of people are keeping it close to home with the pandemic. Lots of things to be concerned about this time of year.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. You know, up-end our whole households this time of year with presents and trees, and holly and decorations and all kinds of things, so our little pets are experiencing all kinds of changes in their environment that over the last 11 months they haven't seen. And maybe if they're babies, if they're puppies or kittens, they've never seen it in their whole life.

Nick Rusch:

Right. And Doctor, by and large, are pets generally, fairly adaptable, or are these things that genuinely upset them, and how do we tell the difference?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, most of them are just curious about it. There's a few that get upset. I had a cat client a number of years ago that started urinating inappropriately when they put the tree up, because they put the tree where she always sat to look out the window and then she couldn't do it in her usual routine. So they kind of messed her up and she decided that she needed to urinate somewhere else so that became an issue. But most of the time, they're just curious. Kittens may want to climb the tree. Puppies may want to chew up the ornaments, so there are definitely things we need to do to secure the house and make it a little bit safer for our pet so that there aren't any unfortunate accidents this time of year.

Nick Rusch:

And there are, as we know, and maybe with older animals or animals that have been around the house, maybe they know the routine over the course of the year. And I don't know where their mind is development-wise. From year-to-year do they possibly remember, or sometimes are they just inured to it and they just don't care?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, I think they remember. I'm pretty sure that they've got good enough memories. They can go to the vet once and remember what it was like there. So I think they remember that you put up the tree, or you put packages under that were really interesting. And if you've wrapped sausage or chocolate covered raisins, they're delicious to get into when nobody's looking.

Nick Rusch:

Sure. Oh absolutely. And as you've noted before, while you're at work or while you're off running errands or whatever you're doing, they're spending all their time thinking about how to get that done.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's right. You spend 10 minutes decorating the tree and they spend 23 hours and 50 minutes trying to figure out how to undecorate it. So it doesn't take very long for them to get into some trouble. You turn your back and they've been plotting. They've been plotting their interesting little trips under the tree, because they know when they can get into things and when they can't. Don't kid yourself, those dogs, they know. They're just like kids when you pick up the phone. Then they get naughty.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. That's how that works.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Unfortunately, yes. So a couple of tips. There's a device called an X-pen or an exercise pen that lots of people that show dogs use. But most of my pet people, people who just have one or two dogs or one or two cats, aren't even aware that these things exist. And they're easy to buy. You can find them at Fleet Farm. You can find them online. They're easy to buy. And they're basically a portable pen that you can put around the base of the Christmas tree. And the point of that being that you can then safely decorate the tree and put packages under the tree, and the pets, dogs and cats can't get to them. So that's probably the most secure way to keep the packages and the tree from your pets, especially if you've got puppies. They're just so fast at zipping into a place that they're not supposed to be and snatching something that you really didn't think that they were going to know was even there. So an exercise pen works really well.

But if you either can't or don't choose to do that, I would encourage people to, at the very least, tie their Christmas tree to the ceiling. So put a swag hook in the ceiling like you would hang a plant from, and then before you put the angel or whatever tree topper you put on, take a piece of wire, wrap it around the tree top and wire it to the ceiling. Twice in my married life I've had my tree fall completely over. Once was the dog, when she got a little too curious as to what was underneath it and tipped it, and it fell over even though it was secured in the water base. The other time was my husband. So you can't even trust sometimes your spouse.

Nick Rusch:

We at our house, we have used before, just as sometimes a backup, we've used fishing line as well. We've used fishing line. And that seems to have worked just fine.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, exactly. So our tree was near the front door. He came in the house, slammed the front door too hard and the tree tipped over. And especially if you have valuable or irreplaceable heirlooms, beautiful ornaments that your family has handed down through the years, you don't want those to break or to be chewed up. So it's really simple just as you're doing the decorating to think about that.

The other thing to think about is the lights that you run to the Christmas tree, or the stairway for the boughs or whatever decorating you do that may be eliminated, because there's so many cool things now that you can plug in and cast images and do cool things. Cover those cords with... There's a corrugated cord cover, again, that you can buy at Menards or Home Depot or online. It just covers the electric cord so that it's safe, and then the pet will not be as able... If they really try, they can still get to the wire, but most of the time they're not going to get to it. And we've had more than one dog or cat electrocuted by chewing through a wire. And even those little bitty lights that we put on the trees have enough electricity running through that cord to zap them pretty good, and we literally did lose a dog about a year and a half ago to an electrocution. So it does happen so be really, really careful. As you're putting stuff up, that's the time to do it, not once things are starting to become an issue.

Nick Rusch:

Sure. And I think people need to realize too. And this just is something I've noticed over the years with, I've spent a lot of time working with electricity and electrical cords in my life, partially experience-based and partially work-based. But those extension cords and the lights that you get, a lot of the decorations, that rubber covering is very thin. The

insulating rubber is very thin. And for a dog or a cat to work their way through that takes no time at all. It's takes really literally no time at all and they're through.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. One good bite and they're in trouble. And you're right. When you can buy a string of lights for 99 cents, you're not going to get heavy-duty covering on your cords. Let's just get real. If there's a way to make it cheaper, then they will, and that makes it less safe. So just really be thoughtful about the electricity and the tree because those are really quite dangerous.

And then the other things that we need to think about are the things that the pets get into that may be toxic at the holidays that aren't normally hanging around the house. Now, I will say at the beginning of COVID, we had two pets that came in that had ingested, shall we say, inappropriate drugs that one might smoke.

Nick Rusch:

Oh, okay. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

So when the kids came home from college they brought along their stash of marijuana and it was in their bedroom. And of course the dog went in and smelled it and found it and chewed it up, and so we had two dogs that came in that were stoned, and the parents were unaware that the students had come home with their favorite treat. But dogs will get into that. Cats, not so much, but they'll get into that. I've had a dog chew up a bag of chocolate covered raisins that was wrapped and under the tree so we have a toxicity now with chocolate and raisins, all in the same opportunity. Mistletoe berries can be toxic. Most people think poinsettias are and actually they can cause some irritation, maybe some vomiting, but they're really not toxic.

Nick Rusch:

Oh wow, okay. Because you always hear about them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know. It's overrated. So mistletoe berries are dangerous. Holly berries are dangerous, but poinsettias really aren't. But there's macadamia nuts, there's alcoholic beverages. If you have guests over they may not think about setting their beverage on the floor and have the dog come over and their happily drinking away. So anytime that your pet may have ingested something and you're not sure, sugarless gum, sugarless candy, marijuana, whatever it might be, if you think it could be toxic the best thing to do is to call poison control.

There are two services that you can use. One is National Animal Poison Control. The other is Pet Poison Helpline. I'll give both of those numbers, but they can be looked up easily on the internet. And those are the places that you want to call immediately to get some assistance. Now, there is a fee that goes with that. It's around 60 to \$75, because it's not subsidized by the government the way that the poison helplines are that we use for humans, and the human poison lines are not going to help you with your pet because different things are toxic to cats and dogs than are toxic to kids. So you can't call your regular community poison control and expect to get any kind of assistance because they aren't qualified to do that. But both of these have toxicologists on staff.

National Animal Poison Control is (888) 426-4435. So these are numbers to look up and have by your phone. And Pet Poison Helpline is (855) 764-7661. Now they'll ask you for a credit card as soon as you call in, so give them the credit card number and then they're going to get a toxicologist on the phone with you to help you with the size of your pet, the species of your pet. If it's a dog or a cat, how old it is, and what you think they may have ingested and how much. And they can very quickly calculate for you whether there's something toxic, and whether you need to seek veterinary care. And even though there's an associated fee, it's going to be a lot less expensive to do that than to go to the emergency clinic or even to your regular veterinarian to get assistance if it's not necessary.

And some things are things that we don't even want to make our pets vomit from. We had a dog a number of years ago that ate a weight control pill that a teenager had dropped on the floor at Thanksgiving. And if you were to stimulate the dog enough to make them vomit, they may all go ahead and seizure. So there are things that we don't want to make

vomit. And we don't use peroxide anymore because it's dangerous. So you do want to get this phone number by your phone and you want to have it available, and if you call it and spend the \$75, it's going to save you money in the long run, so don't hesitate to do that if you're concerned.

Nick Rusch:

I want to back up just for a second because I'm curious. I have no horse in this race. I'm an asthmatic. I don't smoke anything so please don't read anything in. But I'm interested in the marijuana from the standpoint of, is there a specific danger to the pets from marijuana?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, yes. And it depends on how much they eat and the quality of the marijuana as I understand it. Again, I'm not an expert about marijuana.

Nick Rusch:

No. Me neither.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I know there's different names for different types but that's really all I have a real good handle on. But yes, there are differences. And depending on how much they ingest and what the source is, it can definitely be toxic to the point of being a fatal event. And we've had multiple times that pets have come in with having ingested it. And I find it to be really interesting because we'll typically have one of the doctors say, "Okay, is there any possibility, I don't want to be rude here, but is there any possibility that your dog could have gotten into marijuana?" And sometimes the people know that the dog has and they just don't want to tell us. And they'll be like, "Oh, don't tell Dr. Greer." Well, newsflash, Dr. Greer might already think that and this is the truth. We really need to know so that we can appropriately treat your pets.

Nick Rusch:

Absolutely.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So yes, by the time we've asked if your dog's had marijuana, we already are thinking it. So don't try to hide it. Please be forthcoming because you're going to save your pet's life, and you're going to save a lot of money and time by just being really honest with us about what the exposure might've been. We're not judgmental, but we do need to have the information so we can appropriately address your pet's concerns.

Nick Rusch:

Right. Your whole idea is, you don't care. I mean, whatever, right? Everybody's deal is their deal. Your concern is the health of the animal. That's your concern. That's what you're worried about.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Precisely. And I can't be accurate in my diagnosis and treatment if you aren't forthcoming with the information. So, please be honest. One of them was a kid that I knew well enough. He'd gone to grade school with my kids. And as soon as dad said and so-and-so is home, I'm like ah, and I looked at him and he looked back at me and he realized right away what was going on. So yeah, I'm not judging. I just need to make sure that we are accurate in our diagnosis.

And it's kind of embarrassing to miss something that's treatable, and to lose a pet to something that we could have changed the outcome of with just knowing if we need to make them vomit, if we need to put charcoal down them, what the antidote might be. There's very specific treatments for these different toxicities, whether it's rat poison or marijuana or whatever it happens to be. And because we see enough marijuana floating around in the community, we know that stuff's out there. And CBD oil is a whole different animal than that. But please be aware that honesty and checking around the house before you come can be really helpful.

I had one client that called as her dog was staggering through the house and I suspected that it was a xylitol toxicity, which is a sugarless gum, sugarless candy additive. And by the time they got to the vet clinic she sent her husband and her son with the dog, and she stopped at the store on the way to buy a comparable package of the candy, so that when she got there we knew what it was because the dog had chewed the package up so badly we couldn't read what was in it. So think hard about what you're doing. But grab that package or take a picture of it, or figure out some way for us to really know exactly what your pet's ingested because like I said, with that information, we could be really nailing down a specific treatment. Whereas if you go, "I don't know. I think he might've gotten into something."

There's no tox screen and this isn't Quincy. There's no tox screen, and there's really no way for us to know those things without your input and your help. So all your quick detective work can be really helpful. And ask the kids, because sometimes the kids have inadvertently left something in a backpack or wrapped up in a blanket where they thought the dog couldn't get to it. All kinds of places we find these things are showing up, not just wrapped under the tree, but lots of places. So just be vigilant about those things so we don't miss anything.

Nick Rusch:

How sharp of her to stop at the store and do that. That was very prescient, very smart.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. It was and I didn't even think about asking her to do it. She was on it, man. She was a rock star client.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. That's great.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And her dog survived so it was great. So yes, you can do some pretty good things.

Nick Rusch:

I remember, I want to say back in college, and a friend of mine maybe ingested some of the product we were discussing, and then would blow it where the kitty, into the cat's face. And I thought, you might think that's funny, but really how cruel to do that to the kitty.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is cruel. And there's actually a term for it. It's called hotboxing. Because people think it's funny and especially the more of it you've ingested, the funnier it becomes, unfortunately, but it's not funny for the pet because the pets are the ones that pay the price. So please, don't do things that are inappropriate for your little pets. Take good care of them. They count on you so be nice.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah. Well, I think people do it, and sometimes I don't think they mean any malice, but I don't think they stop and think. I mean, the same thing was, and maybe you heard about this several years ago. The cucumber challenge or something. Apparently if you put a cucumber near a cat, it kind of freaks the cat out. So there are all these videos on YouTube of people doing this. And I always thought, well now, why would you bother the kitty? If you have a nice kitty... And you would see, they would surreptitiously put the cucumber near the cat, and for whatever reason, the cucumber did indeed freak the cat out and they seemed to think it was amusing. It's like, why would you bother the kitty like that? The cat's not doing you any harm. I don't understand the behavior I guess.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Yeah. I agree. I really don't understand it.

Nick Rusch:

I guess everybody wants to be a comedian, but why at the cat's expense? The cat doesn't find it funny. Who's the rest of your audience? It's you and the kitty they're in the house so I don't know. I don't know.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly. And you don't need to post those things on Facebook or YouTube. It's just not nice. You're going to come off looking like kind of a jerk, so-

Nick Rusch:

Agreed! Agreed!

Dr. Marty Greer:

... let's be nice to our little pets.

Nick Rusch:

Not only that, but at this point we've all seen it. And like I said, and the only reason I looked it up, it came in my showprep where they were talking about it. There was an internet sensation or whatever that people were doing. And I thought, well, I kind of want to see that because I want to, what are these people up to? But every time I saw it, all I could think was, well, that's being mean to the cat. That's the only thing I could think. That's all I got out of it. So I don't know. I don't know.

Nick Rusch:

Well, Doc, there's all sorts of things during the holidays and we can't possibly get to all of it, but we'll be chatting again. And there's so many things that we need to watch out for and keep those animals in mind, because as you say, they are very Machiavellian, they're plotting while you're gone. The cats and the dogs. Most of their plotting is benign, but sometimes it can get them into mischief that they don't realize that could be harmful to them.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. For sure. For sure. So, yeah, just keep in mind that those are some simple things that you can do. At my house, when I put up a tree, I'll tend to put bells, just little bells on some things, I mean on the lower branches, so that it alerts me to the fact that the dog is over there rooting around under the packages, and that the kitten has now decided that climbing the tree that you installed in the living room for their entertainment and pleasure, they're scooting up the tree trunk. So those little bells can be really helpful in alerting you and then you can scoot out there. And also I'll put candy canes on the bottom branches so that if they do chew something up it's not going to hurt them, but take the cellophane off first. Because cellophane does not digest. I have surgically removed cellophane from a cat.

Nick Rusch:

I'm sure you have.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So just think about it. And you can do some really smart and fun things and still have great fun at Christmas and still, your family can enjoy it. It doesn't have to be all doomy gloomy we can't have any fun, if we just do a little planning ahead.

Nick Rusch:

In our remaining 45 seconds, Doctor, let's have your contact information so folks can get ahold of you.

Dr. Marty Greer:

The phone is (920) 269-4000. We're open seven days a week. Our address is on Columbia Drive, catty-corner across from Quad/Graphics, just outside of Brownsville at 41 and 49. And our website is smallanimalclinic.com.

Nick Rusch:

Dr. Marty Greer of Veterinary Village. Doc, it's always a pleasure. I always enjoy talking with you. We learn a lot, and hopefully we learn a lot of things that can keep our pets and maybe us a little safer every holiday season, and really all through the year. Thanks so much.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

Have a great one.