

Holiday Safety Tips for Rabbits, Guinea Pigs, Hamsters, and Other Small Pets

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The holidays are a happy time of the year, but present special challenges to owners of small pets. Being an instinctive creature of habit, your small pet might not cope well with the holiday season transformation in your household. The sights and sounds you enjoy might well disturb your pet. With attentive care, you can prevent or minimize the stress and remove potential hazards.

Sources of stress

- Any change can result in stress for your small pet. Decorations. Trees and lights. Music. Foods. The distinctive sights, sounds, and smells of the holidays represent big changes, even if your small pet never leaves his cage. In addition, many of the decorations could be potentially harmful to your pet (see below).
- The increased activity in your household during the holidays could keep it illuminated up to 18 hours a day, disrupting your pet's schedule and sleep. Nocturnal animals may find it difficult to sleep with all the daytime activity.
- The coming and going of strangers and relatives can be very intimidating. Your small pet will react to their voices and body language, and may be emotionally charged when approached.
- Because you are busy shopping, entertaining, or traveling, time with your pet may be limited. Play, feeding, and maintenance routines might be disrupted. Your small pet might feel left out or even experience separation anxiety.



Signs of stress

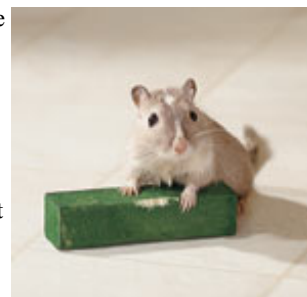
Small pets that are stressed may show a variety of signs including:

- Eating less, or not at all
- Changes in the character or quantity of droppings
- Unwillingness to come out of hiding
- Biting

Holiday stress relievers

Follow these tips to make a difference in your pet's stress level.

- Maintain feeding and hygiene routines. A treat here and there should be just that. Do not make big changes in diet during the holidays.
- Provide your pet toys to pass the time and chew, especially if he is unable to exercise outside of his cage as much as usual.
- Limit your pet's exposure to strangers and activity. This may mean relocating his cage, but this change may be less stressful than exposure to a roomful of loud party goers and interrupted sleep.
- If an accident does occur, be prepared. Make sure you have a [first aid kit](#) ready and veterinarian contact information where it is easy to find. Also, remain calm. Your pet can sense your emotions. If you react strongly, your pet will too.
- Spend quality time with your pet each day. This will provide reassurance, and also give you time to closely watch your pet for signs of stress.



Potential holiday hazards

Pet accidents increase dramatically during the holidays. We do not mean to spoil your fun with these cautions, but hope to keep your holidays safe. If your pet spends time out of the cage, have a safe exercise area in which he can play. Some rabbit owners actually put an exercise pen around the Christmas tree, to keep their bunny safe. Keep in mind that if your small pet accidentally escapes from his cage or pen during the holidays, there are more hazards than usual.

- Prevent exposure to electrical wires, which could cause dangerous burns or electrocution. Conceal them or use pet-proof covers. Otherwise, your pet may mistake them for a chew toy.
- Prevent access to holiday plants. Never allow your pet unsupervised access to poinsettia, holly (leaves and berries), mistletoe, or other plants commonly used to decorate during the holidays.

- A decorated tree poses many hazards. Tinsel, garland, flocking, and artificial snow can be dangerous. The tree may also be coated with potentially harmful fire retardant, fertilizer, or insecticide. Larger decorating lights can become hot and cause burns. Low hanging lights and ornaments can be especially attracting.
- Many of the foods we set out during the holidays can be toxic to pets, including chocolate (bakers, semi sweet, milk, dark), sugary cookies, salty snacks, and other favorites left out for nibbling and, of course, alcoholic drinks.
- Perfumes, potpourri, adhesives, glues, aerosol sprays, and cleaning products can all be toxic.
- Open flames are dangerous. Stoves, candles, and fireplaces always pose a serious threat.
- Tape, ribbons, and the inks and metals used in some gift wraps could cause problems if eaten.
- Visitors, especially children, may not understand how to care for and handle your small pet. It is best to lay some ground rules such as who can and cannot take the pet out; what – if anything – they can feed it and how often; and when the pet should be allowed to sleep undisturbed.
- Discourage guests from bringing their own dog or other pet into your home. If they do, understand that your pet and theirs are sure to be anxious. Keep them separated and do not relax your vigilance.

We hope these tips help you and your small pet enjoy a happy, fun, and safe holiday season!