

Happy holidays! 'Tis the season for tinsel on the trees, ribbon-wrapped gifts waiting to be opened, and darning the stockings to hang! And with all of those things with strings comes our holiday hazard topic, as grim as the Grinch himself, the risk of linear foreign bodies!

As we all know, cats are curious little critters who like to get into and play with anything that dangles. They chase and attack and eat them to their heart's content, but their stomach and intestines often disagree, which can be a big problem. Linear (as in a line shape - such as string, thread, ribbon, dental floss) foreign bodies are a particular subset of intestinal foreign bodies, which is our fancy vet term for a cat eating something they shouldn't have that is now stuck in the intestines.

Linear foreign bodies cause particular trouble in cats, because whatever they ate often starts by getting stuck in the mouth or stomach and then passing into the intestines, causing those intestines to scrunch up like an accordion. Unfortunately, instead of making polka music, accordion intestines (or in vet-speak: "intestinal plication" or bunched up) allow the string to saw through the tissue and cause necrosis (dying tissue of the gastrointestinal tract.) When there is intestinal plication, surgery is needed to remove the foreign material before gastrointestinal tract parts start dying off. It may require multiple incisions to remove the string. Like any abdominal surgery, even after it is successful there are some risks, and the road to recovery can take weeks.

So instead of teasing your cat with ribbon, use cat-friendly toys and monitor/supervise your cat to make sure they don't try to eat anything that is not food. Forgo the tinsel and ribbon and twine this year and choose cat-safe decorations, or at least keep your cat away from anywhere you do have them! Have a happy holiday season and may your days be merry and emergency vet visit free!



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