



THE FAMILY PHARMACIST

A QUICK READ FOR YOUR OTC NEED!

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 2

MAY 2023

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OTC MEDICINE FOR PETS

Recent surveys show that 66% of American households own a pet. So it's not uncommon for a pharmacist to be presented with a prescription for a household pet, usually a cat or a dog. And sometimes pet owners will ask about over-the-counter (OTC) treatments for common pet ailments. Allergies, aches and pains, motion sickness, and gastrointestinal problems affect animals as well as humans. But, can you give your pet a medicine right off the pharmacy shelf? Below are some things to think about when considering giving medicine to your pet.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the legal authority to approve and regulate drugs for animals. Before a drug company can market an animal drug, the company must get the drug approved by the FDA. Just as in people, the manufacturer must demonstrate that the drug is safe and effective for a specific use in a specific animal species. Using a human medication for a pet is called "extra-label" or "off-label" and usually requires a prescription or a recommendation from a veterinarian. There are very few human OTC drugs approved by the FDA for use in pets. So always make sure you check with your veterinarian before giving your pet a drug of any kind. Species, breed, and pet size can affect the way medications work in animals. And, it's important to remember that animals metabolize drugs differently than humans. For example, dogs have more blood per pound of body weight and their kidneys filter waste products and eliminate water faster than humans. Cats have limited liver function and may be unable to eliminate certain drugs. Numerous drugs that are safe to use in people can be toxic or fatal in pets. And if a medicine is safe for an animal, the dose may be much different than in humans. The table at the end of the article gives some common medicines used in pets along with the appropriate dose for a cat or dog. But always check with your veterinarian before administering drugs to any animal.

A word of caution. Before using medicines intended for humans in your pet, be aware that some drugs intended for humans are particularly dangerous in certain animals. For example, *acetaminophen* (as in

Tylenol[®] and store brands) is not FDA approved for use in animals; however, it has been used effectively by veterinarians for the treatment of certain types of pain in dogs. But as little as one-half of an 80 mg chewable tablet (made for children) can be fatal to a cat. It poisons the cat's red blood cells to prevent them from carrying oxygen to the rest of the body. Another drug, *phenazopyridine*, is available in *Azo*[®] Urinary Pain Relief OTC and used for discomfort and frequent urination caused by urinary tract infections in people. It too can irreversibly affect your cat's blood causing anemia and death. Numerous OTC products are available to treat local pain and are labeled as topical anesthetics. They contain the ingredients, *lidocaine* and *benzocaine* and are hazardous if ingested or inappropriately applied to pets. These medicines can affect the central nervous system and heart of your pet and cause other life-threatening symptoms.

Treating Allergies. Allergies in cats and dogs are long-term conditions that usually require life-long care and management by your veterinarian. While the same house dust, house dust mites, tree pollens, grasses and weeds, molds or food can cause the problem (just like humans), the physical appearance of allergy symptoms is different in pets. If your veterinarian agrees, OTC antihistamines can be used in dogs and cats to reduce irritation and itching caused by allergies. Children's *Benadryl*[®] (or a store brand of *diphenhydramine*) is easy to use in pets because it's a liquid that allows for accurate measurements. (See the table at the end of this article.)

Pain Symptoms. Both cats and dogs can have dangerous responses to *aspirin*, *ibuprofen*, *naproxen* and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), all of which can cause serious gastrointestinal bleeding and kidney problems. That said, there are NSAIDs made just for dogs. But these should only be prescribed by your veterinarian. Never give OTC NSAIDs intended for humans to your pet. Currently, no OTC NSAIDs are approved by the FDA for long-term use in cats. Cats are especially sensitive to the side effects of NSAIDs. *Acetaminophen* is sometimes used for pain in dogs, but should only be administered under the supervision of your vet.

Car Sickness. If you've tried all the non-drug preventative measures and your pet still gets sick when you travel, there are OTC medicines that are safe in dogs and cats. *Dramamine*[®] (*dimenhydrinate*) is available OTC in 50 mg tablets which can be split to get the right dose. It's the same drug people take for motion sickness and it also works for pets. Medium size dogs can be given 25 mg. Small dogs and cats should only have a dose of 12.5 mg (1/4 tablet). There are also veterinary-specific medicines that your vet can prescribe for motion sickness in your cat or dog. Give them at least an hour before you travel. But again, make sure your vet approves.

Gastrointestinal Problems. It might be tempting to use an OTC product for diarrhea in your dog, but *Imodium*[®] A-D (and store brands containing the active ingredient, *loperamide*) should not be used for certain dog breeds. Collies, Australian Shepherds, German Shepherds, and Old English Sheepdogs, for example, are breeds that may experience toxicity from this anti-diarrheal drug if they have a certain genetic mutation. Drugs like *Pepsid*[®] AC (*famotidine*) and *Prilosec* OTC (*omeprazole*), are used in dogs and cats to prevent and treat stomach ulcers and other gastrointestinal problems. These and other generic drugs in the same class are available OTC but are not simple antacids, so check with your veterinarian before using them for your pet. Gastrointestinal symptoms can be serious and should always be brought to the attention of your veterinarian.

Inactive ingredients. You've probably noticed that almost all human OTC medicines have a section on "Inactive Ingredients." Inactive ingredients can be vehicles or solvents, sweeteners, fillers, and other chemicals that are not the "active ingredient." While these added ingredients may not be a problem for humans they can adversely affect your pet. *Alcohol*, used as a solvent in some OTC medicines, can cause a dangerous drop in blood sugar, blood pressure,

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and body temperature if consumed by your pet. *Xylitol*, used as a sweetener, can be harmful to dogs by causing low blood sugar and liver failure. *Xylitol* is also found in many food products and personal care items like mouthwash and toothpaste. Be sure to read the label under “Inactive Ingredients” before giving any OTC medicine to your pet. The *American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)* has a lengthy list of these household chemicals on its website and provides links to poison control and veterinary references. See the following link: <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>.

Accidental Poisoning in Pets. Accidental ingestion of medicine and household products can happen in animals the same way it occurs in small children. Curious pets may eat flavored drugs that have not been stored properly. For an emergency in the US and Canada call the *ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center*. The phone number is 888-426-4435.

Dosing Examples of OTC medicines used for pets. Drug doses for animals (and people) many times are given using the metric system (milligrams/kilogram, mg/kg). Take your pets weight in pounds and divide by 2.2 to get the kilogram (kg) weight of your dog or cat. For example, if your dog weighs 40 pounds: $40/2.2 = 18.2$ kilograms. It’s that simple. The table below is just to show you how medicine doses differ from one animal to the next. It’s not intended for self-diagnosis or treatment without checking with your vet. That’s because some drugs should only be given after a diagnosis by a veterinarian is made. For example, before using *Imodium* to treat diarrhea, your vet will be certain that the diarrhea is not due to an infection and inflammation of the large intestine caused by bacteria. Drugs that slow intestinal movement when infection is present may be dangerous for your pet. If your veterinarian has prescribed a drug for your pet and you need assistance in getting the prescription filled, or you an-

ticipate having trouble getting your animal to take it as directed, there are two pharmacies in the St. Louis area that are members of the *American College of Veterinary Pharmacists* (see the list of *Handy Pet Resources* below). Veterinary pharmacists are licensed pharmacists who are trained and certified to fill prescriptions, compound medications, and manage drug therapies for animals. They can work closely with your veterinarian. If you are outside the St. Louis area, the *American College of Veterinary Pharmacists* website has a search feature available to find a participating pharmacy in your area. See their link in the list below.

There are many drugs used in animals that are not mentioned in this article. The few mentioned here illustrate the complexity of giving medicine to animals. Your veterinarian and a veterinary pharmacist are the best sources of information on how to safely treat your pet with medication when it becomes necessary.

Dosing Examples of OTC Medicines Used for Pets			
Medication	Used to Treat	Example Oral Dose in Dogs	Example Oral Dose in Cats
Benadryl® (diphenhydramine)	Allergies	2 mg/kg three times daily	2 mg/kg two to three times daily
Dramamine® (dimenhydrinate)	Motion sickness Car sickness	2 to 4 mg/ pound every 8 hours	12.5 mg every 8 hours
Pepsid® AC (famotidine)	Gastrointestinal problems	0.5 mg/kg once daily	
Prilosec® OTC (omeprazole)	Gastrointestinal problems	0.5 to 1 mg/kg once daily	0.7 mg/kg once daily
Gas-X® (simethicone)	Gas, bloating	25 to 200 mg daily	0.3 to 0.5 milliliters of the infant drops two or three times daily
Imodium® A-D (loperamide)	Diarrhea	0.08 to 0.2 mg/kg every 8 to 12 hours	0.08 mg/kg three times daily
Delsym® (dextromethorphan)	Cough	0.5 to 2 mg/kg every 6 to 8 hours	
Mucinex® (guaifenesin)	Expectorant (respiratory)	3 to 5 mg/kg every 8 hours	
Original source: Pharmacist’s Letter, Chart, November 2021; Plumb’s Veterinary Medications Guide, 2015			

Handy Pet Resources

American College of Veterinary Pharmacists website: <https://vetmeds.org/pharmacylocator/>

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA): <https://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control>

ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center: Telephone 888-426-4435

Lindenwood Drug, 6903 Lansdowne, St. Louis, MO; Phone: 314-781-2445—Pet pharmacy service

Neels Pharmacy & Wellness Center, 8 Crestwood Executive Center, St. Louis, MO; Phone: 314-849-3123—Pet pharmacy Service

<https://familypharmacist.org>

References on File

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