



PAW & CLAW PRINTS



TIMELY TOPIC SUPPLEMENT

Pets and over-the-counter (OTC) medications

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Humans and animals are different, yet there are many medications designed for humans that are used by veterinarians for treating dogs, cats and “exotic pets” such as rabbits, rats and guinea pigs. Examples range from antibiotics such as amoxicillin and ciprofloxin to stomach protectants such as pepcid and carafate. Dosages usually have been based on pharmacological studies since the metabolism and excretion of drugs can vary with the species and dosages accordingly vary.

However, while many medications are indicated for the treatment of your pet and are recommended and dispensed by your veterinarian, there are many medications, available at your local pharmacy, which could be harmful to your animal. Owners may unwittingly give drugs that can be damaging to the pet’s health. The following is meant to highlight some examples, but is, by no means, an exhaustive list of over-the-counter (OTC) drugs that can be detrimental to pets’ well-being. NEVER give an over-the-counter medication without first talking with your veterinarian and ascertaining if such a drug can be given and if so, how much can be safely given.

Anti-inflammatories and anti-fever medications- *Most of these should not be used at all; when used, they should not be given concurrently with steroids (i.e prednisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone etc)*

Aspirin/ascriptin- while relatively safe for humans, their routine use in dogs and cats is not recommended. Occasionally, they can be used in very low and infrequent doses for certain medical conditions when advised by your veterinarian (such as the management of arthritis in some dogs or certain heart conditions in some cats).

However, long-term use usually leads to stomach ulceration and sometimes, perforation. Vomiting, diarrhea, and darkly-colored stool (from digested blood) can occur with long-term use of aspirin. These side-effects can occur even with the so-

called “stomach safe aspirin” such as ascriptin (aspirin with a malox coating).

Ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), naproxen (Aleve), acetaminophen (Tylenol)- While these are commonly used as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory in humans, they are not recommended for use in dogs or cats since they can stomach ulcers and perforations and result in anemia due to blood loss. Signs seen can include vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite and abdominal pain. Kidney damage is another sequel of administering these drugs. Cats are extremely sensitive to acetaminophen. After giving as little as ½ tablet, cats will develop labored breathing and discolored mucous membranes with blue to brown colored mouth and lips. Death is the usual outcome for cats given Tylenol.

Anti-diarrhea medications

Peptobismol, containing bismuth subsalicylate, a form of aspirin that is toxic to cats, is not recommended for use in cats and most dogs.

Kaopectate, containing kaolin and pectin, has long been considered a harmless over-the-counter treatment for stomach upsets for animals. Now the “*New and Improved*” Kaopectate contains this same product as found in Peptobismol (bismuth subsalicylate) and thus, it must be avoided in all cats and some dogs that may be sensitive to salicylates or aspirin-like products.

Immodium can decrease gastrointestinal motility that may lead to other problems in pets with vomiting and diarrhea.

Anti-cold medications

Some of these products contain acetaminophen and thus, cannot be used on pets. Others contain pseudoephedrine, which can cause toxicity in animals. Others contain anti-histamines such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl), clemastine (Tavist {without the decongestant} (not Tavis-D with the decongestant), chlorpheniramine (Chlortrimaton), which, when used appropriately, are safe; if given at too high of a dosage, sedation, vomiting, diarrhea or even seizures can occur.

Topical agents

Cortisone creams can worsen a condition such as when it is applied to a pet that has ringworm (a fungal skin condition). If applied to a surgical incision, it can delay healing. When cortisone, even in the topical form, is used long term, there can be sufficient absorption of steroids to cause systemic effects (increased thirst and urine output, increased hunger and liver changes). Antibiotic creams, such as neosporin ointment, are usually safe but sometimes, they can cause problems if used long term and used on certain types of wounds such as those that are infected.

Recommendations for treatment with the ingestion of any toxin usually include the induction of vomiting if oral ingestion has occurred within a short period of time, usually within 1-2 hours. Induction of vomiting can be efficiently done by your veterinarian by giving certain drugs that stimulate the vomiting center of the brain (i.e. apomorphine). Gastric lavage (“stomach pumping”) is occasionally done.

In cases when vomiting is recommended but when there is delay in getting the pet to a veterinarian for immediate treatment, it may be recommended that the owner give hydrogen peroxide orally; sometimes, but not always, this can stimulate vomiting. The dosage is 3% hydrogen peroxide- 1 teaspoon per 5 pounds of body weight given undiluted. It is ok to repeat one time if no vomiting occurs within 20 minutes. If no vomiting occurs, there is no benefit of continuing to give hydrogen peroxide. The total amount given should not exceed 3 tablespoons. Note that syrup of Ipecac is not recommended since it is usually not effective and can cause heart problems and protracted vomiting.

However, not in all cases is the induction of vomiting recommended. If the animal is too sedated from the toxin, it may get vomit material into its lungs and suffocate and/or get aspiration pneumonia. Damage to the esophagus can occur when the material is passed back up so that vomiting is contraindicated in cases when a caustic (i.e. bleach, some oils such as pine oil, turpentine and phenols used in such household disinfectants such as Lysol) or abrasive (ground glass, metallic materials) substance was ingested, If more than 1-2 hours has elapsed since ingestion, the drug has already been absorbed via the

intestinal tract and causing vomiting may not prevent further uptake. The administration of activated charcoal may be recommended by your veterinarian to help “bind” the toxins already in the intestinal tract. An important part of the treatment includes supportive care such as the administration of intravenous fluids and medications to control seizures and heart arrhythmias. Unfortunately, specific antidotes for toxins are rare.

In the case of an inappropriately applied topical medication, immediate bathing is recommended, usually with a detergent such as Dawn liquid detergent as well as efforts to prevent grooming and oral ingestion, in the case of cats.

In addition to your veterinarian, another valuable source of information and help is the **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** in Urbana, Illinois. Their web site is www.aspca.org. They have a **24 hours emergency hotline (888) 4-ANI-HELP**. For a small fee, they will immediately put you in contact with a veterinary toxicologist who can advise you on what to do, what to watch for and what to expect. They will also be able to advise you of the need to consult with your veterinarian if hospitalization is recommended. In any case when a known or suspected toxin may have been ingested by your pet, contact your veterinarian or the Animal Poison Control Center immediately. **DO NOT TAKE A WAIT AND SEE APPROACH.**

Always consult with your veterinarian before administering any over-the-counter medication to your pet.

