

Administering Medications to Your Dog

- Before you leave your veterinarian's office with a new medication, be sure to address any concerns or questions with your veterinary team.
- It is very important to follow all label directions carefully.
- Do not risk being bitten or otherwise injured while trying to medicate your pet. If you are unable to administer medication, your veterinarian may be able to offer other options.

Understanding the Medication Instructions

The first part of successfully administering medication to your dog is making sure that you understand the instructions for giving the medication. These instructions include route of administration (for example, by mouth, into the ears, or into the eyes), dosing frequency (such as once daily, every 12 hours, or every 8 hours), duration of treatment (for example, 7 days, until gone), and other special considerations (for example, give with food, follow with water).

Sometimes there is flexibility with medication instructions; for example, some medications can be given "as needed," or a twice-daily dosing schedule may be adaptable to once-daily dosing. However, for other medications, the recommended dosing instructions need to be followed closely. Before you leave your veterinarian's office with a new medication, be sure to address any concerns regarding the medication with your veterinary team. For example, if your work schedule does not permit dosing every 8 hours, your veterinarian may be able to recommend a different medication that can be given less frequently. Ask about your pet's expected response to the treatment.

It is very helpful to write a medication schedule for your pet on a calendar, including the date and time that the medication needs to be administered. This will help you to (1) avoid forgetting to give a dose and

(2) remember when the course of treatment has been completed. It is also very important to follow all label directions carefully. Improper storage (such as keeping a refrigerated medication at room temperature) can affect the safety and effectiveness of medication. Additionally, it is important to give the medication for the correct length of time. Complications can occur if antibiotics are not given for the full duration of recommended treatment; in addition, some medications, such as corticosteroids, cannot be discontinued without causing illness, so it is very important to give medications as directed. If your pet experiences any medication-related side effects, contact your veterinarian promptly for advice before adjusting a dosage or discontinuing the medication.

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Administering Pills

If you've never given a dog medication before, it can be difficult to know what method will work best. Some dogs take pills very readily if the pill is hidden inside a treat (such as liverwurst, a small piece of soft cheese, peanut butter, or cream cheese) or given with a small amount of canned food. Pills can also be crushed (or capsules broken and emptied) and mixed with a small amount of canned food. However, your dog must eat all of the food right away to ensure receiving the full medication dose. Also, some coated pills and capsules have a bitter taste if the capsule or the coating is removed. If the medication makes the food taste badly, your dog may refuse to eat it. Before choosing one of these options, ask your veterinarian

if the medication can be given with food (including dairy foods such as cheese). You will probably know after the first or second dosing whether this method will work.

If you must give your dog a pill directly by mouth, here's a method that usually works. This technique takes practice and may require more than one attempt to get your dog to swallow the pill. If your dog is not used to having your hands in or near his or her mouth (as with toothbrushing, for example), gradually introduce your dog to this by stroking your dog's muzzle and chin gently for a few moments. If you think your dog may try to bite you, do not attempt this technique; ask your veterinarian about alternative medication options, such as the following:

- Stand/kneel beside your dog (on his or her right side if you are right-handed)
- Hold the pill between the thumb and index finger of your right hand
- Using your left hand, reach over the top of your dog's nose and squeeze your thumb and middle finger between your dog's upper and lower teeth. Your thumb should be on one side of your dog's mouth and your middle finger on the other side. Try to stay behind the canine teeth (the long, pointy teeth near the front of the mouth). If you're doing this properly, the sides of the upper lip will curl in as your fingers curl in.
- Once your fingers are inside, gently tilt your dog's head back to encourage your dog to open his or her mouth.
- Once the mouth is open, use your right index finger and thumb to place the pill near the base of the tongue. Then remove your hands quickly so your dog can swallow.
- Rub your dog's throat lightly to encourage swallowing. Offering a small amount of water can also help.

Administering Liquid Medication

Some pet owners prefer liquid medication because administering it does not require placing your fingers inside your dog's mouth. However, your dog may refuse to swallow the liquid and, if your dog is very

large, the amount of liquid required may be so large that it is not practical. Here are some tips for administering liquid medication:

- Draw the medication into the dropper or syringe and hold it in your right hand (if you are right-handed).
- Stand/kneel beside your dog (on his or her right side if you are right-handed).
- Place your left hand behind your dog's head to stabilize it. You can gently stroke the back of the head to distract your dog.
- Using your right hand, insert the tip of the dropper or syringe into the side of your dog's mouth. Try to stay close to the molars and away from the canine teeth.
- Once the tip is inside, empty the medication into the mouth and release your dog's head.
- Rub your dog's throat lightly to encourage swallowing.

Do not risk being bitten or otherwise injured while trying to medicate your pet. If you are unable to administer medication, your veterinarian may be able to offer other options.

Troubleshooting Tips

If you are unable to administer medications to your dog, here are some suggestions that may help:

- ***You may need help.*** If your dog won't cooperate with receiving medication, ask someone to help you restrain your dog while you control the head and give the medication.
- ***Do not risk injury.*** Do not risk being bitten or otherwise injured while trying to medicate your dog. If you are unable to administer medication, call your veterinarian and request advice or assistance.
- ***Ask your veterinarian if a different formulation is available.*** Some medications are available in several forms, including pills, liquid

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given by mouth with an eye dropper or syringe, chewable flavored treats, and transdermal gels (gel that is absorbed into the bloodstream after being applied to the skin). If a formulation doesn't work for you, ask your veterinarian if there is another option for the medication your pet is receiving.

- **Consider asking the pros.** Some veterinarians can arrange daily outpatient appointments for a technician or assistant to administer your dog's medication. If your schedule doesn't permit this, some veterinarians may be able to board your dog so that medication can be given until the course of treatment has been completed.