

How to Administer a Topical Medication to Your Dog

- Many conditions in dogs require medicine to be applied to the skin.
- Follow your veterinarian's recommendations closely.
- Always put health and safety first. If the procedure seems dangerous to you or very painful for your pet, stop and consult your veterinarian.

The Basics

Many conditions in dogs require medicine to be applied to the skin. This procedure can be relatively easy, as long as you follow a few simple guidelines. The most important guideline is to always put health and safety first. If, for any reason, your pet becomes so agitated that you feel you are at risk of being bitten, stop. If the procedure seems excessively painful for your pet, stop and get your veterinarian's advice.

Follow Recommendations

Topical medications come in several forms—creams, ointments, lotions, and patches. Applicators may or may not be provided. It is important to closely follow your veterinarian's recommendations for applying these medications. Treating too frequently or too aggressively can make the problem worse, not better. Sensitive, already inflamed skin can be further damaged. It is important to use only medicines prescribed by a veterinarian and to treat for the full length of time prescribed. Do not stop treatment early, even if the problem seems to be resolved.

What You Need

- Safe work area
- Medication prescribed by your veterinarian
- Latex or other gloves (if recommended)
- Elizabethan collar (if necessary; ask your veterinarian for advice)

Technique

Your veterinarian will recommend the best technique for applying the medication, depending on whether it is a cream, ointment, lotion, or patch. If the medication comes with an applicator, follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use the applicator.

When applying topical medications, be aware of the following issues:

- Some medications should be allowed to dry before people (especially children) or other pets come in contact with the treated dog. Follow instructions on how long to wait before allowing your dog to interact with family members.
- If you are applying medication to inflamed or damaged skin, be careful not to further irritate the area with too much rubbing.
- If you are using a patch (e.g., for pain control), be very careful that it does not come off and become stuck to a person or another pet.
- If your dog consistently licks the medication off, ask your veterinarian about using an Elizabethan collar—a cone-shaped collar that fits over your dog's head to prevent licking.

If your dog will not sit still while you apply the medication, you may find it easier to stand behind him or her so that his or her back is against your legs. Small dogs can be wrapped in a large towel and held against your body, exposing only the head and the area to be treated. Be sure not to wrap your small dog too tightly.