

# Medication Monitoring

- Medication monitoring can help ensure that your pet is not experiencing unwanted side effects from a medication. It can also tell your veterinarian whether the medication may need to be adjusted.
- All medications have potential side effects.
- If you are giving your pet more than one medication, the medications may interfere with each other, causing side effects. This is called a *drug interaction*.
- Making sure that your veterinarian knows about all the medications and supplements you give your pet can help prevent drug interactions.
- If you suspect your pet is having side effects from a medication, contact your veterinarian immediately for advice.

## What Is Medication Monitoring?

Medication monitoring can have many components. It can involve testing the levels of a drug in your pet's blood to ensure that those levels are high enough to be effective, but not too high (which may cause problems or side effects). It may include discussing your pet's medical history to help ensure that your pet is not experiencing any unwanted side effects from a medication. It may also involve having your veterinarian examine your pet periodically to ensure that the clinical signs associated with the illness being treated are responding appropriately to therapy.

In many cases, medication is given for a short time, like when antibiotics are used to treat infection. However, health issues like heart disease, allergies, arthritis, or epilepsy may require you to give your pet medication every day for months or years. Over time, the way your pet's body tolerates medication may change, requiring your veterinarian to adjust or sometimes change a medication. Monitoring allows your veterinarian to assess these and other variables to make sure that your pet continues to do well on any medication.

When used appropriately, most medications have minimal ill effects. However, all medications can have

unwanted or harmful side effects. Sometimes these effects are caused by sensitivity to an ingredient in the medication. Side effects can be mild, like a simple stomach upset, or they can be life-threatening. Either way, they should be taken seriously and reported at first notice. Part of treating your pet involves monitoring your pet at home so that any side effects can be reported to your veterinarian.

## How Is Medication Monitoring Performed?

Medication monitoring begins before you leave your veterinarian's office with a new medication. When your veterinarian prescribes a medication for your pet, he or she will explain what it is, what it's for, how to give it to your pet, and details of potential side effects. For example, if your pet is prescribed insulin for diabetes, your veterinarian will spend time with you making sure that you know how to give it, how often it should be given, and what signs to look for that might indicate a potential problem. Before you leave the office, your veterinarian will work with you to make sure that you know exactly what to do, what changes to look for, and what to do if problems arise.

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Sometimes medication monitoring involves blood tests. For example, your veterinarian may want to test your pet's blood to find out information about your pet's overall health and how well certain organs (such as the liver and kidneys) are functioning before prescribing certain medications. Sometimes, medication can change the results of

these tests over time, so for long-term medications, your veterinarian may recommend repeating these tests periodically to help ensure that your pet's body is continuing to tolerate the medication.

Checking blood levels of specific medications is also sometimes recommended. For example, if your pet is receiving phenobarbital (a medication used to control epilepsy), your veterinarian may recommend having the phenobarbital blood levels checked periodically. This can help ensure that the dosage of phenobarbital is within a range that can successfully control epilepsy but is not too high, which can be associated with unwanted side effects.

Any medication can cause side effects, so monitoring your pet at home for drug-related side effects is a very important part of medication monitoring. If you are giving your pet more than one medication, the medications may interfere with each other, causing side effects. This is called a *drug interaction*. Making sure that your veterinarian knows about all the medications you give your pet can help prevent drug interactions. Some veterinary practices ask you to fill out a checklist when you bring your pet in for a physical examination or surgery. Often, this list will ask for the names and types of medications your pet is currently receiving. It is very important to list all your pet's medications. Don't forget to also list vitamins, supplements, and natural products. This is especially

true if you visit more than one veterinarian because the practices will not necessarily have access to each other's information. You may want to bring your pet's medications and supplements with you to the office.

Your veterinarian is an excellent source of information about your pet's medications. Other possible sources of information include:

- The medication label
- Product inserts (these are not always available)
- Client information handouts
- You should always read any printed instructions that come with the medication.

### Benefits of Medication Monitoring

Medication monitoring can have many benefits, including making sure that your pet's medical problem is responding to treatment, making sure that your pet is tolerating his or her medications, and minimizing the risk of potential side effects.

Observation is an important part of medication monitoring. Being aware of how your pet normally reacts to a medication can help you quickly recognize when something is wrong.

**If you suspect your pet is having a reaction to a medication, contact your veterinarian immediately for advice.**