



The ABCs of Giving Your Pet Medicine

Paws for Pets

An obvious but often overlooked truth about medication is that it can't work if it isn't given -- and given correctly. This goes for people and animals alike.

I've had years of practice to get good at giving pills and other medications to pets, but the families of many of my patients often do not know how to perform -- or feel comfortable performing -- this critical task

The following is additional advice I give my clients who must administer oral, eye, and ear medications to their cats and dogs at home.

Giving oral medication

First, it is important that your pet is in a sitting position whenever you administer any oral medication. *Never give oral medications to an animal who is lying down -- she could choke.* Never give oral medication to any animal who is having a seizure or is unconscious, vomiting, or behaving aggressively.

When giving your dog or cat a pill, use one hand to pull the pet's snout up slightly toward the ceiling. This will force the lower jaw to drop a bit. Next, using your free hand, gently pull down on the frontmost part of the lower jaw and put the tablet or capsule on your pet's tongue, placing it as far back into the center of his mouth as possible. Then close his mouth and hold onto his snout to keep his mouth

closed until he has shown evidence of having swallowed the pill. (You will either see or feel him swallow or lick his nose.) Gently stroking a pet's throat or blowing on his nose will sometimes make him swallow the pill more quickly.

If your pet won't swallow the pill, or if you find it easier to administer the medication this way, you can hide the pill in food. But remember, you need to make sure your pet has not figured out a way to eat the food and spit out the pill. Also, if your pet is ill, her appetite may be off and she may not eat all of her food. If the tablet or capsule becomes crushed or opens, it may make the food taste bitter, causing your pet to think better of eating it next time.

Be careful of the type of food you hide the pill in. A dog with pancreatitis shouldn't eat fatty foods, for example, so you wouldn't want to give a dog with this condition a pill in a piece of hot dog or cheese -- two of the more common foods that people tell me they hide pills in.

Some people use a pill gun to administer medication to a pet who is extremely resistant to taking pills. These are plastic tubes that hold the pill and allow you to place it in the back of the throat without putting your hands in the animal's mouth.

If you are trying to give a pill to a squirmy cat, you can avoid getting scratched by wrapping him in a towel. Leave only the cat's head exposed, and give the pill either with

Continued on page 2

The ABC's of Giving Pets Medication ... continued

your hand or with a pill gun. If your pet is too aggressive to administer a pill to safely, you will need to let your vet give the medication. It won't do anyone any good if you get hurt in the process.

Giving liquid medications

Liquid medications are commonly dispensed for pets, especially for smaller animals (including puppies and kittens) because the dose of medication these animals need is often too small for pills. Some liquid medications need to be refrigerated, and others should not be, so be sure to read the entire label. Most liquid medications will need to be shaken before each use.

Again, your pet should be sitting when you administer liquid medication. Carefully draw up the dose needed. (Study the dropper or dose syringe that your vet provides before you leave the clinic so that you are sure you know how to draw the exact amount of medication needed.) Put the dropper or dose syringe into the side of your pet's mouth, just behind the canine teeth. Press the dropper or dose syringe slowly so that your pet can easily swallow the medication.

Administering eye medication

Applying ointment to a pet's eye can be as tricky as giving an animal oral medications. One is that people are often squeamish when it comes to the eye -- many of us don't want to touch our own eye, let alone our pet's. Another is that it's a natural reaction to shut your eye if you see something coming at it, and this is what your pet will do when she sees an approaching tube of medication. Finally, eye medications must be administered frequently -- often three to four times a day -- if they are to work optimally. This is because blinking causes the medication to wash out of the eye quickly.

If your pet needs eye medication, ask your vet to demonstrate how to apply it before you leave her office. That way, if you have any questions, they can be answered before you try to wrestle with your pet at home. Never feel embarrassed to ask for a second demonstration, to double-check a dosage, or to try administering the medication yourself in front of your vet. Don't forget: Medications that are administered incorrectly will not work and could harm your pet.

Eye medications generally come in the form of drops or ointments. The technique for administering either is basically the same. For big dogs, the easiest way to administer eye medication is to have the animal sit down, preferably

in a corner to prevent him from backing away. He can also be in a lying position. For a cat or small dog, the method of wrapping a towel around the pet can help.

Rest the hand that you are using to administer the medication on the bone above your pet's upper eyelid. This will help prevent poking the medication tube or bottle into the eye if you are jostled. Using your other hand, tilt the animal's head back slightly and gently pull down on the lower eyelid with the thumb of that hand.

If you are placing drops, squeeze the appropriate amount into the eye; if you are using ointment, place a small stripe of medication right on the eye. Make sure that the tube or bottle does not touch your pet's eye as you do this.

At first, you may find it easier to have two people perform this task -- one person to hold your pet and one to administer the medication. If you have any doubts about your pet's temperament, it is best to put a tight-fitting muzzle on her while administering the medication.

Administering ear medication

Ear infections are a common ailment in dogs and cats. Some breeds are particularly susceptible, including the Cocker Spaniel. Ear medications come in cream, ointment, and liquid forms. Some of the liquid medications need to be refrigerated, so be sure to check your bottle for the correct storage information.

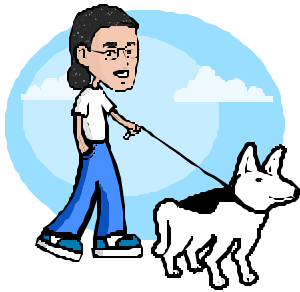
To administer medication to your pet's ear, stand on the same side of your pet's body as the ear that you are treating. Lift the floppy part of the ear (if necessary), and place the medication in the middle of the ear opening. Next, rub the base of the ear -- this will draw the medication down into the deeper parts of the ear.

If the medication you are using needs to be refrigerated, it may feel cold to your pet. So drop the medication in slowly to allow him to get used to it. If your pet is in a lot of pain (severely infected ears can be very painful), or if he is behaving even slightly aggressively, I strongly recommend that you use a tight-fitting muzzle on the pet. Again, sometimes this process is easier with two people.

As with any procedure you do with your pet, your safety must come first. So make sure that you not only know the proper techniques for administering the medication but that you also will not get injured in the process.

Fitness Plans for Pups

Tips for Couch Potatoes & Workaholics



After watching a lone Black Lab at a dog beach for more than an hour, I realized he'd been abandoned. He would walk up to the closest person, lean against him, enjoy some attention, and then watch wistfully as the person walked away. When he leaned on me, I didn't

think twice before loading him into the van with our dog Daisy.

Despite ads and signs, no one showed up to claim him, and we ended up with one of those excellent dogs who somehow just know how to behave. Excellent, that is, unless he didn't get enough exercise. Then Chauncey became silly and hard to control. Who knows? Maybe his former family had failed to give him his fair share and had tired of misbehaviors born of pent-up energy.

A typical member of the highly active Canidae family, Chauncey needed a run each morning and two or three trips to the beach each week. Other dogs like Chauncey have to release their pent-up energy somehow and often do so in ways that frustrate us--such as digging, barking incessantly, and chewing up the lawn chairs. Frustration over such misdeeds lands far too many dogs in shelters.

Grim statistic

The American Humane Association estimates that 60 percent of the dogs destroyed in our shelters had exhausted their owners' patience with their naughtiness. How sad to think that something as simple as daily exercise could have saved many of those lives.

"Today 153 out of 150 dogs are under-exercised," says Dr. Dennis Fetko, a psychologist who is an expert in animal behavior and training, as well as a talk show host. OK, maybe Fetko (also known as Dr. Dog to his audience) is exaggerating a bit--but not that much. Besides reducing misbehavior, daily exercise improves overall health in dogs just as it does in humans.

But before you drag Barney out the door for a 10-mile run, we need to determine the type of exercise suited to his size, breed (or breeds in the case of mixes), age, personality, and general health.

For instance, dogs in the sporting, working, and hound groups need far more physical activity than lapdogs.

"While you might never need to leave the house to exercise a Maltese, you could exercise a dog like Bimbo (a cross between a St. Bernard and a Buick) only if you live in a gymnasium," Fetko jokes.

But size isn't the only determinate. Watching a small terrier dash tirelessly about proves that point. Also, Fetko stresses that a 100-pound dog does not necessarily need 10 times as much exercise as a 10-pound dog--with good reason.

"It goes back to the genetic engineering which produced the largest breeds of dogs," says Fetko. "What kind of madman would breed a 200-pound English Mastiff with the energy output of a Yorkie?"

The right program

Young puppies need no exercise program. They play with toys or clamber after the fleet teenage kitten for short periods and then fall sound asleep. By the time they're six months old you'll be taking them for short walks, but they won't be ready to join you for a daily three mile walk until they're older. In fact, overworking an immature dog can actually cause permanent harm.

By the time most dogs reach the age of seven, they've slowed down and require more moderate exercise routines. However, short walks benefit even a senior dog.

The individual personality of each dog needs to be taken into account, too. Some dogs have a relatively mellow disposition, while others become uncontrollable without regular strenuous exercise. Still others are so loyal that they'll keep going no matter how tired they are.

Before embarking on any new exercise program, you should consult a veterinarian, especially in the case of dogs with chronic conditions like hip dysplasia and arthritis or heart and respiratory ailments. Just as in humans, though, lack of activity can actually exacerbate certain conditions, such as arthritis.

Instead of yelling at that Shepherd mix dragging the doormat around the yard, grab her leash and take her out for a walk, a run, a romp in the dog park, or a swim in the ocean. You'll both benefit from the activity, to say nothing of the time spent together.

Continued Page 4

Fitness Plans for Pups ... continued

Slowing down

Although some dogs communicate clearly, others will just keep going, no matter what. For that reason, it's important for us to know our dogs well so that we can read subtle signs of discomfort, especially as they age. Portland, Oregon, veterinarian Larry Sams advises that we watch for limping, any reluctance to go on, and excessive panting. A clear sign that a dog has overdone it is stiffness the next morning.

According to Gina Spadafori, author of *Dogs for Dummies*, with older dogs "the secret is increasing the frequency and diminishing the intensity. Instead of taking your dog to the park once a week to chase tennis balls until he's exhausted, take him for a daily walk.

"Inactivity punctuated by bouts of overexertion isn't good for any dog, but for the older dog it can be painful, or even dangerous," Spadafori says.

Allergic to Kitty?

Stave off the sniffles with these simple tips

About 6 million Americans have cat allergies, and one out of every three actually lives with Whiskers in the house!

The root of the problem

What sends us into sneezing fits are two proteins (Fel d 1 and cat albumin) from the cat's sebaceous and anal glands. These proteins are shed along with tiny particles of cat skin scales and hair. Inhaling them causes irritation to the airways, resulting in itching, sneezing, and (sometimes) asthma. Stroking Whiskers and getting the dander on your hands can trigger a skin allergy.

So what do you do? Try giving Whiskers a bath. Dogs are no strangers to grooming and doggie baths--but a wash job for your cat? "Yes," says Judith Woodfolk, M.D., research associate in the Asthma and Allergy Disease Center at the University of Virginia. "Cats washed in a tub with soap and water on a weekly basis showed almost an 80 percent decrease in dander. But as soon as you slack off, the dander's back to the levels that trigger allergy attacks."

You're also going to have to have to put in place some stringent housekeeping habits. The most important allergy survival rule is this: No cats in the bedroom. Even if you cringe at the thought of putting up with your kid's bereft wailing about not being able to sleep without Whiskers tucked in securely beside her, do not weaken or give in! Allergists are unanimous in insisting that you keep at least one "safe" room in the house where the allergic person can retreat without encountering cat dander.

The best thing you can do is to install an air purifier with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter in the bedroom. Take a close look at your vacuum cleaner, because some can actually make the situation worse by releasing dander and lung-damaging carbon particles from their own motors back into the room. Think about replacing the old job with one that has a tightly sealed system and a built-in HEPA filter. Of 11 vacuum cleaners tested by the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, only the Miele (a pricey machine that has such a system) did the job, retaining almost all the allergens. If that's not an option, take out the bedroom carpet; carpet holds onto 100 times more allergens than linoleum, wood, or tile flooring does.

Blame the classroom

If your child has allergies, don't think she's off the allergy hook when she's at school. A June 1999 article in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* reported that significant levels of cat allergen are commonly found in schools, carried in on the clothing of cat owners. As a result, cat allergen levels in classrooms are higher than those in homes without cats. When lots of kids in the class own cats, children pick up enough allergen to increase the dander levels in their mattresses! Talk to your allergist about how to control allergic reactions when your child is away from home.

The good news about living with cat allergies is that allergy shots are improving. A new one is in development by Genentech that blocks allergic reactions by neutralizing the allergy-causing antibodies. Unlike those already in use, this immunization will provide permanent protection. You may soon be able to truly say adieu to allergies--good news if you love cats but not the things they do to your nose and throat.