

Using NSAIDs

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Non-prescription painkillers can be purchased anywhere. These non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are considered safe for humans. Unfortunately, many people assume that what's safe for them is safe for their dogs - deadly presumption. In people, ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) is taken to treat aches, pain and fever. For dogs it's the number one cause of drug poisoning.

In cases of accidental exposure, dogs find ibuprofen's sugar coating so attractive that they don't usually stop after eating one tablet; they consume the entire bottle. The symptoms of toxicity depend on the amount ingested. At low doses, ibuprofen triggers stomach upset, diarrhea and abdominal pain. At moderate dose, it causes stomach ulcers and kidney damage. At high doses, it induces seizures, coma and death. A dog that consumes ibuprofen needs immediate, intense fluid therapy to maintain his kidney function and medication to protect his stomach. Ibuprofen should never be given to dogs.

Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), most often referred to as Aspirin, is a weak painkiller that's considered relatively safe in dogs. It can, however, cause depression, vomiting and anorexia if too much is given. It can also trigger significant gastrointestinal bleeding. ASA toxicity is treated with intravenous fluids to maintain kidney function and activated charcoal to absorb the medication.

The buffered form of ASA is recommended for dogs at a dose of 10 to 20 milligrams per kilogram (1 kilogram = 2#3oz.) of body weight twice daily. A baby Aspirin (80 milligrams) will not provide pain relief to a large-breed dog.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol) is likely the safest OTC (over-the-counter) painkiller for dogs if used at the right dose: 10 milligram per kilogram (1 kilogram = 2#3oz.) of body weight twice daily. Signs of acetaminophen over dosage include salivation, weakness, vomiting and abdominal pain. Toxicity is serious and must be treated at an emergency veterinary facility. Acetaminophen should never be given to cats. A cat can die from consuming just one tablet.

When you give an OTC NSAID to a dog, you must follow certain precautions. First of all, these products are not designed for daily, long-term use. They should be given only intermittently, and for short periods.

Second, NSAIDs should not be given with steroids (e.g., prednisone). If these drugs are combined, the risk of gastrointestinal ulceration and bleeding significantly increases.

Thirds, OTC NSAIDs should be given only to healthy dogs. They are contraindicated in dogs with kidney or liver disease, and in dehydrated dogs.

Fourth, a dog on a prescription NSAID (such as Metacam, Rimadyl or Deramaxx) should never be given an OTC NSAID. The combination can cause a stomach problem or amplify the drug's deleterious effects on the kidneys.

If you feel the need to give your dog any medication, call your veterinarian first. Dogs are not people. Their bodies handle medications very differently than ours.

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