

Use Pain Medication Carefully for Dogs

Human medications often work for dogs, but dose carefully with your veterinarian's help.

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Q. Our 4-year-old, 60-pound Labrador Retriever just underwent a root canal. Once his current pain medication runs out (six doses at two per day), are there doggie aspirin equivalents?

A. There are several over-the-counter pain medications that work well in dogs, but dog owners must be very careful in giving them, because some can be toxic and even fatal. Here are some guidelines: Never give ibuprofen. If your dog ever gets ibuprofen by accident, take him or her immediately to your vet or an emergency clinic. Aspirin can be given at a dose of up to 10 mg. per pound twice a day, but should only be given for 3 to 5 days. Aspirin can be hard on dogs' stomachs, and in some dogs will cause stomach ulcers and bleeding. Signs of stomach bleeding include vomit that looks like coffee grounds and stool that is a black color from digested blood. If you see either of these signs, discontinue aspirin immediately and seek medical help for your dog. Aspirin can also cause bleeding due a decrease in clotting ability of the blood, but this is usually associated with longer term treatment. Coated aspirin, such as Ascriptin, may be easier on your dog's stomach, so start with it. Never go over the 10 mg. per pound dose, and remember not to use it more than 3 to 5 days. For a 60-pound dog, I would recommend no more than one extra-strength aspirin (500 mg.) twice a day. Tylenol has been effective in some dogs (but it is fatal to cats). The maximum dose is 5 mg. per pound, three times a day. Pediatric liquid formulations can be used in smaller dogs, but must be dosed carefully. There is the potential for side effects including kidney and liver damage, so I would limit its use to a few doses.

In cases of more severe pain, your veterinarian might be able to prescribe a medication such as Tylenol 3 or Tylenol 4, where Tylenol is combined with codeine to provide powerful pain relief. This type of prescription can be filled at any human pharmacy. Once again, use over-the-counter medications with caution in dogs, and try to minimize the number of doses given.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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