

THE BASICS OF NSAIDS

NSAIDs (Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatories) are a class of drug used to treat pain in humans and animals. NSAIDs are the mainstay of treatment for pets with arthritis, and are also used to manage surgical and traumatic pain. These drugs offer a safe and effective way to manage acute or chronic pain, and have become invaluable in offering older pets happier and more active lives.

Like all drugs, NSAIDs can have side effects. Some pets may be more sensitive to these side effects, regardless of dose or length of use. Common side effects are usually limited to gastrointestinal upset, including lack of or decreased appetite, vomiting, and or diarrhea. Giving these medications with food may help prevent gastrointestinal upset. In chronic use, there is an increased risk of stomach ulceration: stools should be monitored for a black, tarry, or dark red (like “raspberry jam”) appearance. Uncommon side effects include liver toxicity or damage to the kidneys. These drugs should not be given to pets that are at risk for dehydration (vomiting, not eating, or severe diarrhea).

NSAIDs can be given on an “as needed” basis, not to exceed a daily recommended dose based on your pet’s weight. For example, if your pet typically only exhibits stiffness or pain after long exercise, an NSAID can be given before and after an exercise session. As dogs with arthritis age, it is not uncommon for them to need daily NSAIDs. We recommend that any pet on these medications chronically have screening blood work prior to starting medication. Routine blood work should then be performed every six months to monitor your pet’s health.

NSAID DO’S and DON’TS:

DO:

- Monitor your pet’s appetite and stools while on this medication
- Give with food
- Stop the medication and contact us if your pet exhibits any signs of GI upset, or stools appear discolored
- Keep chewable forms hidden and away from pets, as they are flavored like treats, and overdoses are dangerous
- Let us know if thinking of stopping or switching medications, as there is a required “wash-out” period between different NSAIDs (or certain other medications)

DON’T

- Combine NSAID use with other drugs without consulting with your veterinarian (especially over-the-counter pain relievers)
- Give cats human pain medications

OVER THE COUNTER NSAIDS

We do not recommend giving any human medications to your pets. Even aspirin can have serious side effects, and can cause serious gastrointestinal upset or bleeding. Ibuprofen has been shown to be toxic to dogs even at previously published doses, and a single tablet can potentially be fatal to your cat. Tylenol is also toxic to cats, and should never be given. If you believe your pets have had accidental access to human pain medications, please call our office immediately.