

# Alprazolam

- Keep this leaflet safe, as you may need to refer to it again.
- Please ask your vet or veterinary nurse if you have any further questions.
- This medicine has been prescribed for your pet ONLY. Do not take it yourself or give it to another person or any other animal; it may harm them even if their symptoms appear to be the same.

The medicine you have been given for your dog or cat is called alprazolam. It may have a trade name such as Xanax®, but often will just be called alprazolam.

## What is alprazolam?

Alprazolam belongs to a group of medicines called benzodiazepines, which act on a neurotransmitter called GABA within the brain and nerves in the body to produce a calming effect. Alprazolam has anxiolytic (anti-anxiety), antidepressant, amnesic (memory-blocking), hypnotic (sleep-inducing), anticonvulsant, sedative and muscle-relaxant properties.

## Why has my pet been prescribed alprazolam?

Alprazolam is used to treat anxiety and fear-related disorders in dogs and cats, especially if these involve signs of panic. The anti-panic, anti-anxiety and amnesic properties of this drug make it particularly suitable for treatment of noise phobias (e.g. thunderstorms), separation anxiety and situational fears (e.g. car travel or visits to the vet). Alprazolam is sometimes also prescribed for urine spraying in cats.

## How should I store alprazolam?

This medicine does not require any special storage conditions. For safety, **all medicines should be kept out of the reach and sight of children.**

## How do I give alprazolam tablets to my pet?

Tablets are best given approximately 30–60 minutes before an anticipated fear-inducing event. Treatment may then be given as needed within the dosing limits prescribed up to four times a day. Tablets may be given with or without food. The tablets may be disguised in a small amount of strongly flavoured food that your pet likes. Alternatively, they can be placed carefully on the back of your pet's tongue and their mouth closed until the entire dose has been swallowed.

## How long will my pet need to take alprazolam?

Due to the relatively rapid onset and short-lived duration of this drug, alprazolam is best used for management of acute anxiety episodes; however, it may be used as part of a long-term behavioural modification plan. Your vet will advise you on the length of time for which you will need to give this medicine. This may vary between patients and can be for the rest of their life although, with appropriate behaviour-modification exercises, many animals can be weaned off the drug as their responses to the triggers of anxiety improve.

## What should I do if I run out of tablets?

Try not to run out. Make sure you order more tablets from your vet if your supply is getting low. If you do run out, contact your own vet for further advice and restart the course as soon as possible.

## What should I do if I miss a dose?

Alprazolam is best given *before* a fear- or anxiety-inducing event. If a dose is missed and your pet receives regular dosing, give the medication as soon as possible; if the drug is being used on an as-needed basis, do not give the dose after the event. **DO NOT** give a double dose to make up for the missed dose and do not exceed the total stated dose in any one 24-hour period.

## What should I do if my pet is accidentally given too many doses?

**Contact your vet immediately** if an overdose is given. However, if a single extra dose is given on a single occasion only, it is unlikely to cause significant harm. The most common side effects with an overdose are sedation, incoordination and amnesia.

## Can my pet take alprazolam if I am already giving them other drugs?

Tell your vet if you are giving your pet any other medications, even if you think they already know. This includes herbal and off-the-shelf remedies from a pet shop, pharmacy or health store. Caution is particularly advised if your pet is receiving any antifungal medication (such as itraconazole), as this inhibits the metabolism of alprazolam. If you have any concerns about using alprazolam with any other medications, please ask your vet for further advice.

## What are the possible side effects of alprazolam for my pet?

Side effects include drowsiness, anxiety, discoordination, hallucinations, increased appetite, insomnia, muscle relaxation and sedation. If given to animals with fear-related aggression, this drug may facilitate uninhibited behaviour and thus lead to more serious aggression. Long-term treatment with alprazolam may lead to a physical dependence on this drug, which can result in undesirable behaviour changes if this drug is abruptly stopped. If your pet shows *any* unusual symptoms whilst taking this medication, please contact your vet.

## The Prescribing Cascade

This medicine is authorized for use in human patients and is used by vets under the 'prescribing cascade'. The medicine is not authorized by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), for use in dogs/cats/pets. Your vet can explain the 'prescribing cascade' in further detail to you and also explain why they are prescribing this drug for your pet. You will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you understand the reasons that the drug is being prescribed and its possible complications, before the treatment is issued.

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### What should I do if my pet is unwell while taking alprazolam?

If your pet is unwell while receiving medication, you should not give any further doses and should contact your vet **immediately** for advice.

### What should I do if a person accidentally takes this drug?

If a person takes your pet's tablets, the person should be taken to the local hospital **immediately**. Take this leaflet and any remaining tablets plus their container (even if it is empty) with you.

### Whom do I contact if I want to know more?

If you have any questions about this drug or any concerns with your pet's health, then contact your own vet. They will know your pet's medical history and will know about alprazolam.