

# Diazepam

This BSAVA client leaflet is provided by:

- 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 diazepam. It may have a trade name such as Diazemuls®, Stesolid® or Valium®, but often will just be called diazepam.

## What is diazepam?

Diazepam belongs to a group of medicines called benzodiazepines. These drugs act in the brain to reduce feelings of anxiety and treat epileptic seizures (fits). Benzodiazepines also relax muscles.

## Why has my pet been prescribed diazepam?

Diazepam has several uses in veterinary medicine. Diazepam is sometimes used alone or in combination with other drugs. Diazepam helps to control epileptic fits in cats and dogs. It is most commonly used at home as a rectal solution or suppository to treat cluster seizures or status epilepticus, when dogs or cats repeatedly fit. Diazepam can also be used to help treat behavioural disorders that are related to fear and anxiety in dogs and cats, such as thunderstorm phobias, especially when there are signs of panic. Diazepam may be used in combination with other drugs to manage these conditions. It can also be used as an appetite stimulant in cats that are reluctant to eat. Diazepam can also be used to relieve the discomfort of muscle spasms, which can occur in different areas of the body, associated with different conditions. For example, muscle spasms in the back can occur with spinal problems such as disc disease, and spasm of parts of the urinary tract can occur when there is a blockage. Diazepam can also be used to treat some types of tremors.

## How should I store diazepam?

Diazepam should not be stored in a plastic container as this can inactivate the drug. A special container will be provided. Do not transfer the medication to a different container after it has been dispensed to you. For safety, **all medicine should be kept out of the reach and sight of children.**

## How do I give diazepam suppositories or rectal liquid to my pet?

Suppositories need to be gently inserted into the rectum of your pet, using a gloved finger. Small tubes of liquid diazepam are also available for rectal administration. Insert the end of the tube into the rectum and squeeze out the contents; the tube should then be removed and disposed of. Suppositories or rectal liquid should be inserted while your pet is having a fit or soon afterwards. Once you have given it, please contact your vet for further advice.

## How do I give diazepam tablets or oral solution to my pet?

Try to disguise the diazepam in a small quantity of strongly flavoured food that your pet likes. Alternatively, it can be placed carefully on the back of your pet's tongue and their mouth held closed until the entire dose has been swallowed. **Do not attempt to give tablets during a fit.**

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

Your vet will advise you on the length of time for which you will need to give this medicine. This may vary between patients.

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

Contact your vet if your supply is getting low. Diazepam **should not be stopped suddenly** if your pet has been taking it for several weeks. The dose should be gradually reduced over time. If you do run out, contact your vet for further advice and restart the course as soon as possible if needed.

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

If you do miss a dose, give your pet the dose that they should have had **straight away**. Make sure the next dose is separated by at least 6 hours before reverting to normal dosing time. **DO NOT** give double doses to make up for missed doses.

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

One extra dose is unlikely to hurt your pet. However, contact your vet immediately if a large overdose is given, as this can cause marked excitation and aggression, disorientation, depression, slowed reflexes, and even coma.

## Can my pet take diazepam 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 or off-the-shelf remedies from a pet shop, pharmacy or health store. Diazepam should not be mixed or diluted with water or any other medications. Diazepam should not be given to your pet if they are already taking cimetidine or omeprazole (both used to treat or prevent stomach ulcers) or digoxin (used in heart problems). Antihistamines and opioid analgesics (a group of pain-relieving drugs) may increase sedation if given with

### 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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diazepam; if your pet looks sleepy, contact your vet as soon as possible. Phenobarbital, often used to treat epilepsy, can affect the duration of action of diazepam when they are used together.

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

Diazepam may cause sleepiness, weakness and incoordination (wobbliness). More rarely, diazepam may cause excitation and aggressive behaviour. Liver failure has been very occasionally reported in cats that have had repeated doses of diazepam by mouth. If your pet shows any unusual symptoms whilst taking this medication, please contact your vet.

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

If your pet is unwell while receiving medication, you should not give any further doses unless your pet has been taking diazepam for several weeks. In this case you should continue to give your pet the drug at the same dose. In all cases contact your vet as soon as possible for advice.

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

If a person accidentally takes your pet's medication, the person should be taken to the local hospital *immediately*. Take this leaflet and any remaining medication plus its 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 concerns about your pet's health, contact your own vet. They will know your pet's medical history and will know about diazepam.