

# Pyridostigmine

- 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 pyridostigmine. It may have a trade name such as Mestinon®, but often will just be called pyridostigmine.

## What is pyridostigmine?

Pyridostigmine belongs to a group of medicines called cholinesterase inhibitors. These drugs increase the activity of nerves supplying muscles around the body and, as a result, they improve muscle function. In addition, they also enhance the secretion of tears and saliva, reduce the amount of work done by the heart muscle and widen blood vessels.

## Why has my pet been prescribed pyridostigmine?

Pyridostigmine is used in dogs and cats to treat a condition called myasthenia gravis. This is a rare disease where antibodies (produced by the body's immune system against itself) block the nerve endings supplying muscles so that the muscles can no longer contract and function normally. This results in a rapid onset of muscle weakness and fatigue as soon as the patient starts exercising. Pyridostigmine counteracts the blocking effect and improves the function of the nerve endings, thereby helping to restore muscle activity. It may be used in dogs and cats that have a form of myasthenia gravis that causes paralysis of the oesophagus (gullet).

## How should I store pyridostigmine?

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

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

Try to disguise them in a small quantity 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 held closed until the entire dose has been swallowed.

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

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 may be for the rest of the pet's life.

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

Try not to run out. Make sure that 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?

If a dose is missed, give the medication as soon as possible. However, it is best to skip the missed dose if it is almost time for your pet's next scheduled dose. **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 your pet is given an overdose of pyridostigmine as this can be fatal. Pyridostigmine overdose can cause coughing, excess tear production, involuntary passing of urine and faeces, pinpoint pupils in the eyes, rapid repetitive eye movements, slow abnormal heartbeats, agitation and weakness. Eventually an overdose can lead to a 'cholinergic crisis' where the patient develops severe muscle weakness. The muscles responsible for breathing are affected and become paralysed, and therefore a cholinergic crisis can be fatal if it is not urgently treated.

## Can my pet take pyridostigmine 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. Do not give your pet aminoglycosides, lincomycin or clindamycin (all antibiotics), or propranolol (a drug used to treat abnormal heartbeats) if they are already taking pyridostigmine.

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

Pyridostigmine can cause excess salivation (drooling), vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain (your pet may appear hunched and uncomfortable). 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 pyridostigmine?

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

### 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 a person accidentally takes this drug?**

If a person accidentally 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 concerns about your pet's health, contact your own vet. They will know your pet's medical history and will know about pyridostigmine.