

# Steroids

- 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.

This leaflet applies to a group of drugs called glucocorticoids (steroids), which includes prednisolone, dexamethasone, budesonide and methylprednisolone. These drugs are sold under a wide variety of trade names. This leaflet does not apply to steroids that can be given by injection (e.g. anabolic steroids or sex hormones) or applied to the eyes, ears or skin as drops, creams or ointments.

**Steroids resemble a group of natural hormones. They are used to reduce inflammation and, at high doses, suppress the immune system.**

## Why has my pet been prescribed steroids?

Steroids are prescribed to treat many different conditions. The most common conditions that steroids are used to treat are itchy skin, intestinal inflammation (e.g. inflammatory bowel disease), certain types of cancer and diseases caused by malfunction of the immune system (e.g. haemolytic anaemia or polyarthritis).

## How should I store steroids?

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

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

Steroids work better when given with food. Try to disguise the tablets 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 steroids?

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 in a few cases will be for the rest of their life.

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

Try not to run out of tablets. Make sure you order more 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.

**Stopping steroid treatment suddenly, after use for more than 1 month, can be dangerous and should be avoided.** If this happens and your pet becomes depressed, unwell and vomits, **contact your vet immediately.**

## 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 receives an overdose of steroids. However, if a single extra dose is given on a single occasion only, it is unlikely to cause any significant problems.

## Can my pet take steroids 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. Steroids should not be given (if possible) with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. meloxicam, carprofen, firocoxib, cimicoxib, aspirin), which are often used to treat arthritis. Steroids should not be given with some drugs that are used to treat fungal infections (e.g. itraconazole).

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

Steroids cause a range of side effects depending on the dose, length of treatment and the individual. These side effects will stop as the steroids are withdrawn. The symptoms include hair loss, muscle wasting, obesity, lethargy, increased appetite and increased thirst and frequency of urination. You should provide more water than normal for your pet and more frequent opportunities to urinate. It is important *not* to feed your pet more, even if they ask for extra food. Feeding the same daily amount split into more frequent meals may help with increased appetite. Pets that do not normally steal from bins and work surfaces may start to do so, thus it is important to make sure all bins and foods are kept out of reach. Some dogs may show behavioural

## The Prescribing Cascade

Many steroids are authorized for use in dogs/cats/pets. However, on occasion, your veterinary surgeon will need to prescribe a medicine not authorized in veterinary species. In these cases, the medicine is authorized for use in human patients and is being 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.

While the editors and the BSAVA have made every effort in preparing this information leaflet, the contents and any statements are made in good faith purely for general guidance and cannot be regarded as substitute for professional advice. The publishers, contributors and the BSAVA do not take responsibility for the information provided on this leaflet and hence do not accept any liability for loss or expense incurred (by you or persons that you disseminate the materials to) as a result of relying on content in this leaflet. To this end, you are advised to consult your vet and seek their professional advice before taking any steps set out in this leaflet. If you are a vet, you must not rely on the contents in this leaflet without independently verifying the correctness and veracity of the contents. BSAVA is not responsible for any alterations made to this document from the version supplied.

changes; for example, they may become withdrawn or anxious. 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 steroids?**

It is important that patients taking steroids are checked regularly by a vet, since some of the many side effects are difficult to identify. If your pet is unwell while receiving medication, you should 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 medicine, 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 steroids.