



Long term medication in cats and dogs

Many pets suffer from chronic health conditions that cannot be cured, but can be managed with daily medication.

How can I find out more information about the medication that my pet has been prescribed?

All medicines that are licensed for use in pets have an information leaflet included within the box of medication. This includes information from the manufacturer regarding the purpose of the medication, any possible side effects, and recommendations for monitoring pets taking this medication. If you cannot find this leaflet please contact the surgery to ask for a replacement, or look it up online at www.noahcompendium.co.uk.

In some situations there are no suitable medications licensed for use in veterinary patients. If this is the case, veterinary surgeons are permitted to prescribe human medications for these pets. The system that authorises vets to prescribe these medications is known as the Prescribing Cascade. Vets have a 'formulary' (a book containing as much information as is widely known about the use of these medications in cats and dogs) to look up known uses and possible side effects of the drug and will be happy to share this information with you, but there is no official documentation relating to use in pets produced by the drug manufacturers. It is most common to have to use an unlicensed product when vets are treating an unusual condition, or an unusual species, because drug companies do not put their products through the expensive pet licensing system unless there is a large market for its use in veterinary patients. It is not permitted to prescribe a human medicine for a pet unless the vet can confirm that there is no suitable veterinary product available.

Some commonly used medications that are not licensed for use in pets are: chemotherapy drugs (e.g. vincristine, vinblastine), 'extra' pain relief (e.g. gabapentin, amitriptyline), eye drops (e.g. anti-allergy drops, antibiotic drops, drops to treat glaucoma), and medication to stop seizures in patients that do not respond to the standard epilepsy medications.

How often will the vet need to examine my pet on long term medication?

The veterinary surgeon looking after your pet is required to examine your pet as frequently as is necessary to ensure that:

1. the medication is working successfully and is being given at the correct dose
2. any side effects can be detected and addressed promptly
3. the medication is being used in accordance with the manufacturers safety guidelines

The interval between examinations will vary with the condition, patient and medication being used. It is common for patients to be examined fairly frequently at the start of a course of medication, with check-ups becoming less frequent as time goes on. Please ask your veterinary surgeon if you are not sure when your next recommended check-up is due.

Patients that are considered to be stable and at low risk of complications from their illness and their medication will still need to be checked by a veterinary surgeon every 6 months as a minimum. The only exception is for flea and worm medication, in which case the minimum interval for examination is 12 months.

How do I request ongoing supplies of medication for my pet?

Medication can be requested from your veterinary surgeon during a consultation.

If your pet is running out of medication but is not yet due a check-up, you may request additional medication by telephoning the surgery (there is an automated service on which you can leave your request, or you can speak to a receptionist if you prefer), or by completing the online repeat prescription form. Please allow 2 working days between making your request and collecting your medication.

Is there any medical testing that should be carried out for dogs on long term medication?

It is recommended that **all** patients on **any** long term medication have haematology and biochemistry blood tests and a urine test checked annually. The tests check red and white blood cell counts, kidney and liver health, protein, salt and sugar levels. This testing allows your vet to make a much more thorough assessment of your pet's health when checking that it is safe and appropriate for your pet to continue to take their medication.

For some medical conditions and some medications more frequent testing is required, or additional tests are required. The following table is in addition to the annual blood and urine tests mentioned above.

Medication	Recommended testing	Additional information
Hyperthyroid medication	Blood tests for: 1.Haematology (red and white cells) 2.Biochemistry (organ function) 3.Thyroid level every 3 months	Blood tests can be taken at any time of day but the pet should not have missed any medication doses in the previous 3 weeks.
Hypothyroid medication	Blood tests for thyroid level every 6 months	The thyroid blood test should be taken 3-4 hours after the medication has been given that day
Onsior anti-inflammatory	Blood tests for liver at 2, 4 and 8 weeks after starting the medication; then haematology and biochemistry blood testing every 6 months.	

Phenobarbital	Blood phenobarbital level every 6 months once stable in dogs (more often in initial stabilisation period). Once cats are stable, it is not essential to test this level unless there is a change in the medical situation.	Blood test should be taken 1-2 hours before the next dose of medication is due.
Insulin	Blood tests for fructosamine (average blood sugar) every 6 months	This test may need to be carried out more often when patients are unstable; or less often if clients are doing blood sugar testing at home.
Trilostane/ Veteryl	Blood test for cortisol level and urine concentration test after 10 days of treatment and then every 3 months.	The blood and urine test should be taken just before the next dose is due (withhold morning dose before testing if necessary)
Zycortal	Blood test for electrolyte measurement 10 and 25 days after injection for first 2 months of treatment; then every 6 months.	Timing of injections may be altered depending on the results.

How much medication can I take at any one time?

You may take enough medication to last your pet until your next check-up. If medication is taken home but subsequently is not required (the patient's health may alter and medication needs may change) it cannot be refunded. Therefore, many clients prefer to take 1-3 months supply at a time, and call for more as they need it.

Some medications are classified as 'controlled drugs' by the government. The most common controlled drugs that our veterinary patients take on a long-term basis are tramadol, gabapentin and phenobarbital (for epilepsy). Vets can only prescribe 1 month of these medications at a time and there are audit systems in place to make sure that all of this medication can be accounted for. Your vet will not necessarily need to see your pet every month, but you will have to put a new prescription request in every month to continue to collect the medication.

What about written prescriptions?

At Acorn House we hold all of the commonly used medications in stock and are able to order less common medications to arrive within 1-3 days. Therefore, the majority of our clients order and pick up their medications directly from the surgery.

However, if you prefer to order a written prescription from the surgery, you may then use this to purchase your pet's medication from a local or online pharmacy. A charge of £16.77 is payable to Acorn House for each written prescription and then you pay the pharmacy

whatever price they are selling the medication for. Patients taking more than one prescription medicine will need a separate written prescription for each medicine. The prescribing and re-examination rules are exactly the same whether you purchase your medication from the surgery or from another pharmacy (so are for a maximum of 6 months of medication from the last examination for most medications, but only for 1 month of medication for controlled drugs). If you purchase your medication from an online pharmacy make sure that you use a trusted website and fully understand how to administer and store the medication when it is delivered to you.