

Alprazolam

(al-prah-zoe-lam)

Category: Benzodiazepine Sedative/Tranquilizer (antianxiety)

Other Names for this Medication: Xanax®, Niravam®

Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary: None. **Human:** 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, & 2 mg regular and orally disintegrating tablets; 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg, & 3 mg extended-release tablets; 1 mg/mL oral liquid. Compounded dosage forms may be available.

This information sheet does not contain all available information for this medication. It is to help answer commonly asked questions and help you give the medication safely and effectively to your animal. If you have other questions or need more information about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.

Key Information

- ▶ Often used to help treat or prevent fears and anxiety in dogs and cats.
- ▶ When used for thunderstorm phobias or other triggers (eg, separation anxiety) that upset your animal, try to give it about an hour before the triggering event.
- ▶ May be given with or without food. If your pet vomits or acts sick after receiving the drug on an empty stomach, try giving the next dose with food or a small treat. If vomiting continues, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ If you see yellowing of the whites of the eyes or the gums have a yellowish tint, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Sleepiness is the most common side effect, but sometimes the drug can change behavior or work in the opposite way (ie, cause hyperactive behavior) from what is expected.
- ▶ This drug may increase appetite, especially in cats.

How is this medication useful?

Alprazolam is used to prevent and/or treat anxiety (nervousness) or phobias (fears) in dogs and cats. These situations may include thunderstorm or firework phobias, separation anxiety, or other phobias such as car travel or veterinary visits. This drug can also be used to treat house soiling problems in cats that have not been controlled by other methods or drugs. Alprazolam works in the brain to reduce fears, relax muscles, and can lower the chance of seizures (convulsions) happening.

The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has approved this drug for use in humans but it is not officially approved for use in animals. The FDA allows veterinarians to prescribe products containing this drug in different species or for other conditions in certain situations. You and your veterinarian can discuss why this drug is the most appropriate choice.

What should I tell my veterinarian to see if this medication can be safely given?

Many things might affect how well this drug will work in your animal. Be sure to discuss the following with your veterinarian so together you can make the best treatment decisions.

- ▶ There are other drugs that can interact with alprazolam, so be sure to tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what medications (including vitamins, supplements, or herbal therapies) you give your animal, including the amount and time you give each.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian about any conditions or diseases your animal may have now or has had in the past.

- ▶ If your animal has been treated for the same disease or condition in the past, tell your veterinarian about the treatment and how well it worked or didn't work.
- ▶ If your animal is pregnant or nursing, talk to your veterinarian about the risks of using this drug.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist about any medication side effects (including allergic reactions, lack of appetite, diarrhea, itching, hair loss, etc) your animal has developed in the past.

When should this medication not be used or be used very carefully?

No drug is 100% safe in all patients, but your veterinarian will discuss with you any specific concerns about using this drug in your animal.

This drug **SHOULD NOT** be used in patients:

- ▶ That are allergic to it or drugs like it (eg, diazepam, lorazepam).

This drug should be used **WITH CAUTION** in:

- ▶ Aggressive animals. Some veterinary behavior specialists are concerned that using this type of drug in aggressive animals may actually allow them to act out their aggressive tendencies more easily; this is controversial.
- ▶ Animals with liver or kidney disease.
- ▶ Animals with narrow angle glaucoma.
- ▶ Animals in poor health or nutritional state.
- ▶ Older patients.
- ▶ Working or assistance dogs; the drug may reduce their awareness.

If your animal has any of these conditions or signs, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks versus benefits.

What are the side effects of this medication?

Common, but not serious side effects include:

- ▶ Sedation (sleepiness); lethargy (lack of energy).
- ▶ Increased appetite, especially in cats.
- ▶ Cats can show signs of unusual behaviors such as increased affection, depression, or irritability.
- ▶ This type of drug may affect the ability of the animal to learn and slow training.

You don't have to be overly concerned if you see any of these effects unless they are severe, worsen, or continue to be a problem. Contact your veterinarian if this happens.

Side effects that may be serious or indicate a serious problem:

- ▶ Rarely, dogs may exhibit behaviors that are opposite from what would be expected (become excited instead of calm or sleepy).
- ▶ Yellowing of the whites of the eyes or the gums having a yellowish tint. These might be signs for rare liver toxicity, especially in cats.

- ▶ Long-term regular use of this medication can possibly cause physical dependence (addiction) and if the drug is stopped too quickly, your animal may experience severe/uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. If you are concerned about this with your animal or wish to stop giving it, talk to your veterinarian.

If you see any of these, contact your veterinarian immediately.

If my animal gets too much of this medication (an overdose), what should I do?

Overdoses of alprazolam are usually not serious, but significant central nervous depression (eg, confusion, sleeping, coma, decreased reflexes) can occur. Rarely, very serious effects can occur especially if other drugs are taken at the same time. If you witness or suspect an overdose, contact your veterinarian or an animal poison control center for further advice. Animal poison control centers that are open 24 hours a day include: **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** (888-426-4435) and **Pet Poison HELPLINE** (855-764-7661); a consultation fee is charged for these services.

How should this medication be given?

For this medication to work, give it exactly as your veterinarian has prescribed. It's a good idea to always check the prescription label to be sure you are giving the drug correctly.

- ▶ The drug may be given either with food or on an empty stomach. If your animal vomits or acts sick after receiving the drug on an empty stomach, try giving the next dose with food or a small treat. If vomiting continues, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ Do not leave your animal alone after giving this medication for the first time. Watch for excessive sedation (tranquilization, sleepiness) or aggression (threatening behavior/actions) towards other animals.
- ▶ When using this drug for an expected trigger (eg, thunderstorm, separation anxiety) try to give it to your animal about an hour before the start of the event. This will allow the drug to be working at its peak effect when the trigger occurs.
- ▶ When giving the orally disintegrating tablets, be sure your hands are completely dry before handling the tablets.
- ▶ Liquid forms of this medication must be measured carefully. Your veterinarian or pharmacist can help by providing special measuring spoons or syringes.
- ▶ If you have difficulty getting your animal to take the medicine, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist for tips to help dosing and reducing the stress of medication time. One option for animals that are difficult to pill is trying the ODT (orally disintegrating) tablets. These will rapidly dissolve in the animal's mouth and be easily swallowed.
- ▶ If you want to stop giving the medication before the prescription is completed, first contact your veterinarian. There may be an

important reason to continue giving the medication until it's gone. If you are giving this drug on a regular daily basis to your animal, do not stop giving the medication without the guidance of your veterinarian, as physical withdrawal is possible.

What should I do if I miss giving a dose of this medication?

If you miss a dose, give it when you remember and then wait the regular time between doses recommended by your veterinarian before giving another dose. Do not double-up or give extra doses.

How should I store this medication?

- ▶ Store this medication in the original prescription bottle or an approved dosage reminder (ie, pill minder) container at room temperature and protected from direct sunlight.
- ▶ If your veterinarian or pharmacist has made (compounded) a special formulation for your animal, follow the storage recommendations and expiration date for the product.
- ▶ Keep away from children and other animals.

Can handling this medication be hazardous to me, my family, or other animals?

There are no specific precautions required when handling this medication unless you are allergic to it. Wash your hands after handling any medication.

How should I dispose of this medication if I don't use it all?

- ▶ Do not flush this medication down the toilet or wash it down the sink. If a community drug "take-back" program is available, use this option. If there is no take-back program, mix the drug with coffee grounds or cat litter (to make it undesirable to children and animals and unrecognizable to people who might go through your trash), place the mixture in a sealable plastic bag to keep it from leaking out, and throw the bag out with the regular trash.
- ▶ Do not save leftover medication for future use or give it to others to use.

What other information is important for this medication?

- ▶ Use of this drug may not be allowed in certain animal competitions. Check rules and regulations before entering your animal in a competition while this medication is being administered.
- ▶ Products containing alprazolam are controlled prescription drugs in the USA. It is against federal law to use, give away, or sell this medication to others than for whom it was prescribed.

If you have any other questions or concerns about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.