

Points on Pets: People's pills poison pets

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Several months ago my friends gave me a puppy to help me get through my depression. Unfortunately, the puppy is very active and I am actually depressed by not being able to train him properly. I have been tempted to give the puppy some of my antidepressants and other medications to slow him down. Giving him a small dose of my tranquilizer might just slow him down and help both of us to be more sane. Is this a bad idea?

A: While it is understandable how a new puppy might be too much for you to cope with while trying to deal with your own problems, you definitely should not give him any of your medications. Depending on the amount of human antidepressant given and the size of the dog, lethargy, incoordination, vomiting, diarrhea, and hyperactivity might be seen. Agitation; loss of appetite; tremors; drooling; abnormalities in blood pressure, heart rate and rhythm; seizures; respiratory depression; and coma are quite possible whenever human antidepressants are either accidentally or intentionally given to pets. It is an understatement to say that pets are not humans and often react differently to drugs.

You should never give human drugs or medications to your dog unless specifically advised to do so by your veterinarian. All antidepressants and other human drugs should be kept well out of the reach of animals and children in a secure cabinet. Many childproof containers are ineffective in preventing accidental drug poisonings in animals. Of course, many dogs and cats can quickly chew through plastic pill containers.

A veterinarian should be consulted as soon as possible whenever a pet has ingested any poison or human drug. If a local veterinarian cannot be reached in a timely fashion, veterinarians are always available to answer questions through the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435.

As an alternative to giving your new puppy drugs to slow him down, you might consider joining a puppy behavior class or enrolling him in obedience classes. Your interactions with the other dog owners in the classes might be helpful for you as well as for your puppy. Your veterinarian can help you find appropriate puppy classes in your local area.

Q: Not long ago while watching a game show on television, we heard a question related to the idea that cats have nine lives. Where did this idea come from? Unfortunately, most of our cats have not seemed to be so lucky as to have nine lives.

A: The many stories about cats narrowly escaping injury or death while falling from high places or being in other dangerous situations, probably led to the conclusion that cats have multiple lives. Although no one can state for sure when the statement that cats have nine lives was first said, it might have originated in ancient times. Apparently, the prophet Muhammad had the habit of stroking each of his three cats three times, which according to some legends gave his cats nine lives (three times three).

The idea of cats having nine lives appears in several works of literature. A 1546 collection by John Heywood states: "No wife, no woman hath nine lives like a cat." Another old proverb states, "It has been the providence of nature to give this creature nine lives instead of one." Shakespeare mentions the cat's nine lives in "Romeo and Juliet."

Where the myth that cats have nine lives will always be unknown. However, it is a nice thought and wish for our feline companions.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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