

Points on Pets: Human medications are not meant for pets

by R.G. Elmore, D.V.M.

Q: I was horrified last evening when my husband gave our schnauzer one of his prescription antihistamine tablets in an effort to stop our dog's scratching due to allergies. My husband told me that the drugs humans take are the same as those prescribed for animals and that I was overreacting. Our dog lived through the night; however, he is still scratching and chewing on his feet this morning.

Was I overly concerned about the medications?

Is it OK to give our dog our prescription medications?

A: Your concerns were warranted because drugs prescribed for humans should not be given to animals. Pets are not simply small humans. Although many of the same drugs are commonly used for treating similar problems in both humans and pets, the recommended dosages, routes of administration and treatment times of the drugs vary in different species. Dissimilar animals often have contrasting reactions when given the same drug or medication. In fact, what might be helpful in one animal might kill another animal.

As you probably already know, most prescription and nonprescription antihistamine products intended for human use contain more than one ingredient. Some nonprescription human antihistamine products used to relieve cold symptoms, sinus infections and allergies contain additional substances that could be harmful to pets.

You should take your dog to your veterinarian as soon as possible to obtain an accurate diagnosis for the scratching and chewing on the feet. Proper medications or changes in the environment might be recommended to make your dog more comfortable. After completing a physical examination, your veterinarian can outline a wellness program including vaccinations, the prevention of both internal and external parasites, proper teeth care and nutrition for your particular dog. There will no longer be a reason for your husband to share his drugs with your dog.

Q: We wonder if it is possible to train small dogs to use litter in the house rather than taking them outside several times each day. Because we are gone many hours each day, we are concerned about our dog being unable to relieve himself at the right times.

A: While it is possible to litter train some dogs, it is not easy, especially for dogs already accustomed to going outside to relieve themselves. If you are gone a lot of the time, this training will likely be even more difficult.

An alternative to leaving your dog alone for long periods of time might be to take him to a doggy day care center. This will not only solve the problem of his not being able to go outside throughout the day, but will also provide him with the stimulation and activity required to make him a well-adjusted animal with a pleasant life.

Another alternative might be to hire a dog walker to exercise your dog once or twice a day while you're at work. Your veterinarian or local pet store clerk might be able to help locate a suitable day care center or walker. No dog should have to spend the entire day alone.

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