



INSTINCT
DOG BEHAVIOR & TRAINING



BEHAVIOR MEDICATIONS FOR DOGS

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WHAT are behavior medications for dogs?

In veterinary medicine, many of the same behavioral medications used in people are also used in pets. There are many different classes of medications that can be used for behavioral conditions in dogs. Some of these medications can take 4 weeks to take effect whereas others may work much faster. Which medication(s) are best suited for your pet depends on many factors and is best determined by your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist (DACVB). Just like in people, it may take time to find the right one or ones that work best in your pet. In addition to medications, there are supplements that can be used in place of or in conjunction with medications. Each patient is different; it is important to discuss the pros and cons of medications and supplements with your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist (DACVB).

HOW do behavior medications work?

Different classes of medications work on different types of receptors in the brain. Medications alter neurotransmission, which influences what products brain cells make. These different products, in turn, influence many different aspects of neurobiology. The changes resulting from medications have many results. Some examples are: making learning easier, creating new neuronal growth, increasing or decreasing the amount of certain neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine; and, facilitating efficiency in processing information.

WHEN are medications considered as part of a behavior program?

Once it has been determined by a qualified medical professional that the behavioral condition of your pet is not falling within normal parameters and/or is not responding to appropriate behavior modifications, training, and environmental changes, medications may be recommended. An experienced veterinarian with a special interest in behavioral disorders, or a board certified veterinary behaviorist (DACVB), will be able to guide owners on whether the condition is such that medications should be used immediately, or if medication should be delayed until after starting behavior modifications. Medications should be considered:

- When a dog is regularly experiencing levels of fear, anxiety, or arousal such that it is significantly impacting the dog's quality of life and or impairing the dog's ability to learn
 - instances of severe panic and fear
 - generalized anxiety, where the dog is moderately anxious or worried in a wide variety of situations.
- When a dog's physiological responses to specific events or stimuli are so intense as to make learning *without the help of medication* difficult or impossible
 - Quickly becomes over-aroused, agitated, or frustrated
 - Is slow to recover after being aroused

It is imperative that medical conditions be ruled out prior to diagnosing a behavioral disorder. There are many endocrine disorders, neurologic disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, dermatological disorders, and musculoskeletal disorders that may be contributing to or causing behavioral issues.

WHY might my veterinarian recommend medication?

There are two potential reasons why your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist will recommend behavior medication for your dog:



1. To provide relief from mental anguish and suffering, as in the case of anxiety and panic disorders
 - If a dog regularly reacts to certain fear- or anxiety-inducing situations or stimuli by **trembling, drooling, urinating or defecating, attempting to flee, or inflicting harm to themselves or others**, this dog is experiencing a welfare crisis; it is our responsibility as pet owners to act immediately to provide relief as quickly as possible. Appropriate behavior medications can be a needed and necessary first step in easing mental pain experienced by these dogs.
2. To help properly regulate a dog's internal, physiological state, so that learning can take place
 - Think of this as "Setting the Stage" for learning to occur, and for training & behavior modification efforts to be successfully absorbed. Some dogs – often those who become easily over-aroused, agitated, or frustrated – regularly experience an internal state that prevents them from being able to learn new behaviors and responses. In these situations, their body, just like a diabetic with insulin, may need medications to help regulate their internal environment.

HOW does the process work?

If your pet is prescribed medication, it is important to understand that this is a process just like it is for people who are going through therapy. We are fortunate today to have many different medication options, and it may take time to find the right one(s) for your pet. The best way to determine efficacy is to monitor the behavioral progress as you are going through appropriate science-based behavior modification and training. There are some conditions for which medications in and of themselves can be extremely helpful, and other conditions where the results are more nuanced and subtle in the beginning. It is imperative that your veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist be involved in adjusting medications.

WHAT should it look like, *more or less*?

What should I expect to see if the prescribed medication is working as it should?

- **MORE:** -Your dog is comfortable **MORE** often
-Your dog is happier **MORE** often
-Your dog is confident and able to cope with her environment **MORE** often
-Your dog is **MORE** easily able to learn new behaviors and habits
- **LESS:** -Your dog's reactions or behaviors are **LESS** intense, less frequent, or shorter in duration than before
-Your dog takes **LESS** time to recover following an episode/reaction/stressful event

*Remember, the **ONLY** reason to prescribe medication for a dog's behavior is to help **IMPROVE** and **ENHANCE** their quality of life. If you start your pet on medication and he or she appears drowsy, drugged, out of it, dopey etc., it is the wrong medication or dosage for your dog's body, and your dog's doctor needs to be notified.

For HOW LONG will my dog require medication?

The goal is always to wean your dog off the medication, with the hope that once your pet is less anxious, aroused, aggressive, etc., he or she can now learn new, healthy behaviors through training and behavior modification techniques. With this learning comes new neuronal connections in the brain. With these new connections, we hope we can wean off the medications.