

Diazepam

(dye-az-e-pam)

Category: Benzodiazepine Anticonvulsant/Tranquilizer (antianxiety)

Other Names for this Medication: Valium®, Diastat®

Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary: None. **Human:** 2 mg, 5 mg, & 10 mg tablets; 1 mg/mL & 5 mg/mL oral liquid; 5 mg/mL for injection; 2.5 mg/0.5 mL (5.0 mg/mL), 10 mg/2 mL (5.0 mg/mL), & 20 mg/4 mL (5.0 mg/mL) rectal gel.

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

- ▶ When using diazepam for thunderstorm fears or other stresses (eg, separation anxiety), be sure to give it about an hour before the event or trigger.
- ▶ The injectable form may be prescribed to be given rectally to stop a seizure (convulsion) at home.
- ▶ 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 the whites of the eyes or the gums have a yellowish tint, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Sleepiness is the most common side effect. Rarely, diazepam can cause the opposite effect and result in hyperactivity. It is best to do a trial dose of this drug to see how your pet will respond.
- ▶ Diazepam may increase appetite, especially in cats.
- ▶ Contact your veterinarian immediately if your cat stops eating or seems depressed.

How is this medication useful?

Diazepam is used as a sedative or tranquilizer in many animal species. In dogs and cats, it can be used for preventing or treating anxiety or phobias (eg, nervousness, fear), treating breakthrough or ongoing seizures, and to cause muscle relaxation.

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.

- ▶ Other drugs can interact with diazepam, 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 pet 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) your pet 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, clorazepate, clonazepam).
- ▶ With severe liver problems.

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

- ▶ Pregnant animals or animals that may become pregnant. These types of drugs have caused problems in human infants when their mothers took them during pregnancy and may do so in animals.
- ▶ Aggressive animals. Some veterinary behavior specialists feel 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, myasthenia gravis, or with narrow angle glaucoma.
- ▶ Animals in poor health or nutritional state; very old animals.
- ▶ Working or assistance dogs; the drug may reduce their awareness.

If your pet 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?

Diazepam is usually tolerated well, but side effects can occur.

Common, but not serious side effects include:

- ▶ Sleepiness, lack of energy.
- ▶ Incoordination, weakness (eg, stumbling, clumsiness).
- ▶ Excessive salivation, drooling.
- ▶ Greater appetite, especially in cats.
- ▶ Cats can show signs of greater affection, depression, irritability, or strange behaviors.
- ▶ 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 unless they are severe, worsen, or continue to be a problem. Contact your veterinarian if this happens.

Rare, but usually not serious side effects include:

- ▶ Dogs may exhibit behaviors that are opposite from what would be expected (become excited instead of calmer). Report this to your veterinarian.

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

- ▶ Yellowing of the whites of the eyes or gums with a yellowish tint (jaundice). Rarely, drugs in this class have caused liver problems, especially in cats.
- ▶ In cats, decreased or lack of appetite or energy level, or continued vomiting.
- ▶ Long-term, regular use of this medication can cause physical dependence (addiction) and if the drug is stopped too quickly, your animal may experience serious withdrawal symptoms. If you are concerned about this effect with your animal or want to stop giving it, talk to your veterinarian

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

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

Overdoses of diazepam are usually not serious, but significant central nervous depression (eg, confusion, sleeping, coma, decreased reflexes) can occur. Rarely, other serious effects can occur especially if other sedating 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.

- ▶ 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 cats continue to vomit after getting this medication, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Do not to leave your animal alone after giving it this medication for the first time. Watch for excessive sedation (sleepiness, fatigue) or aggression (threatening behavior or actions) towards other animals or people in your household.
- ▶ If this medication is being used for breakthrough seizure control, your veterinarian will prescribe a solution of diazepam that is to be inserted into the animal's rectum during a seizure (convulsion). To ensure your safety and the safety of your pet, make sure you understand the proper technique before the need arises.
- ▶ When using this drug for an expected trigger or event (eg, thunderstorm, separation anxiety), give the drug to your animal about an hour in advance of the trigger to allow the drug to be working at its peak effect when the trigger occurs.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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.

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, 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 pets?

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 left over medication for future use or give it to others to use.

What other information is important for this medication?

- ▶ When used as a treatment for behavioral problems, diazepam usually works best in combination with behavior modification therapy.
- ▶ 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 diazepam 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.