

# Cetirizine

(se-tih-ra-zeen)

**Category:** Antihistamine

**Other Names for this Medication:** Zyrtec®, Zirtec®

**Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 5 mg & 10 mg film-coated or chewable tablets; 1 mg/mL oral syrup. There are also 5 mg cetirizine with 120 mg pseudoephedrine extended-release tablets, but these are not appropriate for animal use.

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

- ▶ **Use only products that contain cetirizine as a single active ingredient.** Any other ingredients (eg, pain relievers, decongestants) found in human-label combination products can be toxic to animals.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Antihistamines should be used on an ongoing basis in animals that respond to them. They work better if used before exposure to an allergen (eg, pollen).
- ▶ Cetirizine may cause less drowsiness than other antihistamines, but sleepiness can still happen.

## How is this medication useful?

Allergies cause histamine release, which results in itchy skin. Cetirizine blocks histamine's effects and reduces itchiness from allergies. It can also be used as treatment for itching related to certain types of cancers (eg, mast cell tumors). As with other antihistamines, the response to this drug can be unpredictable, so your veterinarian may try many different antihistamines to see which one works best for your animal. Cetirizine may also be used as a treatment for motion sickness.

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.

- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what medications (including vitamins supplements, or herbal therapies) you are giving your animal, as well as the amount and schedule of 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 did or didn't work.
- ▶ Talk to your veterinarian about the risks of using this drug if your animal is pregnant or nursing.
- ▶ 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 with:

- ▶ A history of allergic reactions to it or related drugs (eg, hydroxyzine) in the past.
- ▶ Appointments for allergy testing. Antihistamines interfere with the results of allergy testing. Talk with your veterinarian about when to stop giving the drug.

If your animal matches any of these, talk to your veterinarian about the possible risks of using the drug versus the benefits it may have.

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

- ▶ With a seizure disorder. Hydroxyzine has caused seizures in some dogs and probably should not be used in dogs with a history of seizures.
- ▶ That have problems urinating or appear constipated.
- ▶ With prostatic enlargement, thyroid problems, or heart disease.
- ▶ With severe kidney or liver disease.
- ▶ Who are old.
- ▶ With glaucoma as it may make the condition worse.
- ▶ Working dogs (eg, guide dogs, search dogs, hunting dogs, sled dogs, rescue dogs), as they may become sleepy and unable to perform their duties.
- ▶ Who are pregnant or nursing mothers. Hydroxyzine has caused birth defects in laboratory animals, so it should probably not be used during pregnancy. Hydroxyzine should be used very carefully in nursing mothers, as it is unknown whether the drug crosses into the milk.

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?

### **Side effects that usually are not serious include:**

- ▶ Side effects are not very common in dogs or cats, but some animals can vomit or drool excessively with this drug.
- ▶ Drowsiness can be a problem in some animals, especially when higher dosages are given to small dogs or cats.

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.

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

Overdoses of cetirizine are usually not serious, but large overdoses may be. If you witness or suspect an overdose, and your animal is showing signs such as excessive drowsiness, contact your veterinarian or an animal poison control center for further advice. Animal poison control centers that are open 24 hours a day include: **Pet Poison HELPLINE** (855-764-7661) and **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** (888-426-4435); 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 prescribed. It's a good idea to always check the prescription label to be sure you are giving the drug correctly.

- ▶ Cetirizine may be given either with food or on an empty stomach. 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.
- ▶ Liquid formulations 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.
- ▶ This medication can be given for various lengths of time. Be sure you understand how long the veterinarian wants you to continue giving this medication. Prescription refills may be necessary before the therapy will be complete. Before stopping this medication, talk to your veterinarian, as there may be important reasons to continue its use.

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

If you are giving this drug twice a day and miss a dose, give the next dose when it is usually time to do so. If you are giving this drug once daily, give it when you remember it and then give it at the regular time the next day. Do not double-up doses or give an extra dose.

**How should I store this medication?**

- ▶ Store all forms of this medication in the original childproof prescription bottle or an approved dosage reminder container (ie, pill minder). Tablets should be stored at room temperature; oral syrups may be stored at room temperature or in the refrigerator.
- ▶ 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?**

- ▶ 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.

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