

Darbepoetin Alfa

(dar-beh-poe-eh-tin al-fah)

Category: Erythropoietic Agent

Other Names for this Medication: Aranesp®

Common Dosage Forms: **Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 10 micrograms, 25 micrograms, 40 micrograms, 60 micrograms, 100 micrograms, 150 micrograms, 200 micrograms, 300 micrograms, & 500 micrograms vials or syringes for injection.

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

- ▶ Injectable medication used to treat low red blood cell counts (anemia) caused by end-stage kidney failure. If you are giving this medicine at home, be sure you understand how and where to administer the injections (shots). It may take several weeks before it works.
- ▶ Biggest concern with giving this medicine is the development of antibodies after using it for awhile.
- ▶ Watch for skin reactions at the site of the shot.
- ▶ Contact your veterinarian immediately if your animal has any seizures (convulsions), fever, joint pain, sores in the mouth, or loss of appetite.
- ▶ Ongoing blood testing is necessary during treatment. Do not miss these important follow-up visits.

How is this medication useful?

Erythropoietin, a hormone made in the kidneys, stimulates red blood cell production in the body. With advanced kidney disease, this hormone is no longer made in sufficient amounts and results in low numbers of red blood cells (anemia). Darbepoetin, a synthetic form of the natural erythropoietin hormone, is used to treat dogs and cats with anemia associated with chronic kidney disease.

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 darbepoetin, 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 did 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 have had adverse reactions to it previously (development of antibodies).
- ▶ With uncontrolled high blood pressure.

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

- ▶ With moderate to severe high blood pressure.
- ▶ With iron deficiency.

If your pet has any of these conditions, 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:

- ▶ Stinging at the injection site.

If this effect is severe, worsens, or continues to be a problem contact your veterinarian.

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

- ▶ Antibodies to darbepoetin. Sometimes an animal's body will destroy the drug and cause it to not work. Your veterinarian will monitor for this, but if your animal starts to develop skin reactions where the drug is injected contact your veterinarian. It may mean that antibodies are starting to form.
- ▶ Low energy level, collapse.
- ▶ Seizures (convulsions).
- ▶ Fever, joint pain, mouth ulcers, or no appetite.

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

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

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.

- ▶ Do not shake the liquid as this can damage the drug and make it less effective.
- ▶ The drug is injected under the skin (subcutaneously). Be sure you understand how to draw up the correct amount into the syringe and the proper places and technique to inject it (give the shot).
- ▶ Use a new needle and syringe each time you give an injection (shot) or mix a vial. Do not reuse needles and syringes.
- ▶ If you have difficulty getting your animal to accept the injections, contact your veterinarian for tips to help with dosing and reducing the stress of medication time.
- ▶ This medication can be given for various lengths of time. Be sure you understand how long your 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 miss a dose, give it when you remember, but if it is close to the time for the next dose, skip the dose you missed and give it at the next scheduled time. After that, return to the regular dosing schedule. Do not double-up or give extra doses.

How should I store this medication?

- ▶ Store the injectable liquid in the refrigerator; do not freeze. Do not use this product after the labeled expiration date.
- ▶ 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 leftover medication for future use or give it to others to use.

What other information is important for this medication?

- ▶ For the safety of your animal your veterinarian will need to do regular blood tests. Do not miss these follow-up visits.
- ▶ Most animals getting this drug will need additional iron supplements.
- ▶ If you are injecting this medication at home, place used needles and syringes in a sharps disposal container immediately after they have been used. Your veterinarian or pharmacist will help you obtain these containers. Be careful not to accidentally stick yourself; do not attempt to disconnect the needle from the syringe. Keep containers out of reach of children and animals. Once about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, dispose containers according to your community guidelines. Check with your local trash removal services or health department (listed online and in the city or county government [blue] pages in your phone book) to see which disposal methods are available in your area.
- ▶ 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.