

# Digoxin

(di-jox-in)

**Category:** Cardiac Glycoside

**Other Names for this Medication:** Lanoxin®, Digitek®, Digox®

**Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 62.5 mcg, 125 mcg, 187.5 mcg, & 250 mcg tablets; 50 mcg/mL oral solution.

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

- ▶ Digoxin can be given with or without food. If your pet vomits or acts sick after receiving this medication on an empty stomach, try giving the next dose with food or a small treat. If vomiting continues, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ Digoxin side effects usually occur when the dose is too high. Signs that may be observed include gastrointestinal effects (eg, lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea), lack of energy, behavior changes, and collapse. Digoxin toxicity can be very serious. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your animal develops any of these signs.
- ▶ Regular monitoring of blood digoxin levels and electrolytes helps detect problems earlier to keep your pet safe. Do not miss these important follow-up visits with your veterinarian.

## How is this medication useful?

For animals with congestive heart failure, digoxin is used to help the heart beat more strongly and move blood through the body better.

Digoxin is also used to treat certain types of heart rhythm disturbances as it can make the heart beat slower. Digoxin is used less now than in the past because it can be toxic if too much is in the body and now, there are other treatments for heart failure.

There were veterinary digoxin products in the past, but they are no longer marketed in the USA. The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has approved drug products for use in humans, but they are not officially approved for use in animals in the USA. 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 digoxin and either increase or decrease digoxin levels in the blood. Be sure to 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.

- ▶ 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 animals that already have too much digoxin in their bloodstream.
- ▶ In animals that have ventricular fibrillation (a type of very rapid heart rate).
- ▶ In animals that have had an allergic reaction to this medication.
- ▶ Most veterinary cardiologists believe that digoxin should not be used in cats that have a type of heart disease called feline hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

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

- ▶ In animals with kidney disease, lung disease, or thyroid disease.
- ▶ In cats, as they may be more sensitive to the drug and have more serious side effects than dogs do.
- ▶ In animals with abnormal blood electrolyte (sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium) levels.
- ▶ In animals with certain heart conditions.

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

## What are the side effects of this medication?

Most side effects occur when there is too much digoxin in the bloodstream.

### **Common but not serious side effects include:**

- ▶ Mild gastrointestinal effects (eg, lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea).
- ▶ Low energy level.
- ▶ Behavior changes.

You don't have to be overly concerned if you see any of these signs unless they are severe, worsen, or continue to be a problem. Contact your veterinarian if this happens.

### **Side effects that may be serious or indicate a serious problem include:**

- ▶ Serious heart rhythm abnormalities that may manifest as sleepiness or collapse.
- ▶ Muscle weakness.

Because digoxin toxicity can be very serious, contact your veterinarian immediately if your animal develops any of these signs so they can be sure that the medication is not becoming toxic to your animal.

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

Digoxin overdoses can be serious or fatal. If you witness or suspect an overdose of digoxin in your animal, contact your veterinarian or an animal poison control center immediately 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.

- ▶ Give digoxin around the same time(s) each day.
- ▶ Digoxin can be given with or without food. If your animal vomits shortly after getting a dose, try giving the medication with food to see if this helps. As vomiting can be a sign of digoxin toxicity, contact your veterinarian if vomiting continues.
- ▶ 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 pet to take this medication, 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 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 this medication in the original child- and light-resistant prescription bottle or an approved dosage reminder container (ie, pill minder) at room temperature.
- ▶ 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?**

- ▶ While your pet is taking this medication, it is important to monitor the amount of digoxin and electrolytes in their blood, both to maximize the drug's therapeutic benefit and to reduce the risk of toxicity. To ensure the best response to this medication, take your pet back for all recommended recheck visits.
- ▶ Use of this drug may not be allowed in certain animal competitions. Please check the rules for your pet's sport before entering it in a competition while you are giving it this medication.

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