

Lorazepam

(lor-ayz-e-pam)

Category: Benzodiazepine Anticonvulsant; Tranquilizer (Antianxiety)

Other Names for this Medication: Ativan®

Common Dosage Forms: **Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 0.5 mg, 1 mg, & 2 mg tablets; 2 mg/mL oral concentrate.

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

- ▶ Often used to treat or prevent fear and anxiety in dogs and cats.
- ▶ When used for thunderstorm phobias or other triggers (eg, separation anxiety) that upset your animal, try to give it about an hour before the triggering event.
- ▶ May be given with or without food. If your animal 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 you see yellowing of the whites of the eyes, skin, or gums (jaundice), contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Sleepiness is the most common side effect, but sometimes the drug can change behavior or work in the opposite way (ie, cause hyperactive behavior) from what is expected.
- ▶ Clonazepam may increase appetite, especially in cats.
- ▶ Contact your veterinarian immediately if your cat stops eating.

How is this medication useful?

Lorazepam is used in dogs and cats for treating seizures (epilepsy) and preventing and treating anxiety (nervousness) or phobias (fears). It also might be useful as an appetite stimulant in cats.

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 for 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 lorazepam, 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 animal 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 how well the treatment 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 animal 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, diazepam, clonazepam).
- ▶ With severe lung or 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 these medications during pregnancy and may do so in animals.
- ▶ Aggressive animals. Some veterinary behavior specialists are concerned 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.
- ▶ Animals with glaucoma.
- ▶ Animals in poor health or nutritional state.
- ▶ Older animals.
- ▶ Working or assistance dogs; lorazepam may reduce their awareness.

If your animal 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?

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

Common but not serious side effects include:

- ▶ Sleepiness, lethargy (lack of energy), incoordination (eg, stumbling, clumsiness), weakness. These effects are more common when starting the drug or increasing the dosage.
- ▶ More drooling than normal.
- ▶ More vocalization than normal.
- ▶ Greater appetite, especially in cats.
- ▶ Cats can show signs of unusual behaviors (eg, increased affection, depression, irritability).
- ▶ Dogs may exhibit behaviors (eg, hyperactivity) that are opposite of what would be expected.
- ▶ This type of drug may affect the ability of the animal to learn and slow its training.

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:

- ▶ Yellowing of the whites of the eyes, skin, or gums (jaundice) (rare). Drugs of this type have caused liver problems, especially in cats.
- ▶ In cats, decreased or lack of appetite (eating less or not at all), acting depressed, continued vomiting.
- ▶ Long-term regular use of this medication can possibly cause physical dependence (addiction), and if the drug is stopped too quickly, your animal may experience severe, uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. If you are concerned about this with your animal or wish to stop giving it, talk to your veterinarian.

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?

Overdoses of lorazepam are usually not serious, but significant central nervous depression (confusion, sleeping, coma) can occur. Rarely, other more 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 **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 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 animal 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 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) toward other animals or people.
- ▶ Depending on why lorazepam is being used, your veterinarian may have you give this drug only occasionally when it's needed, or regularly every day, up to 3 times per day.
- ▶ Sometimes your veterinarian will prescribe a liquid form of lorazepam that is given into the animal's nose during a seizure (convulsion). Make sure you understand the proper technique for how to use it this way before the need arises.
- ▶ When using this drug for an expected trigger (eg, thunderstorm, separation anxiety), try to give the drug to your animal about an hour before the triggering event. Earlier dosing will allow the drug to be working at its best 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. The oral tablets are small, tasteless,

and dissolve quickly in the mouth. Placing a tablet between the cheek and gums and following with a small treat a minute or so later should allow the drug to be absorbed in the stomach.

- ▶ 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. If you are giving this drug on a regular daily basis to your animal, do not stop giving the medication without the guidance of your veterinarian, as physical withdrawal effects are possible.

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 and 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, lorazepam 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 lorazepam are controlled prescription drugs in the U.S. 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.