

# Theophylline

(thee-*off-i-lin*)

**Category:** Bronchodilator/Diuretic

**Other Names for this Medication:** Theo-24®, Theochron®, Elixophyllin®

**Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary:** None. **Human:** Timed-release tablets and capsules: 100 mg, 125 mg, 200 mg, 300 mg, 400 mg, 450 mg, & 600 mg; Elixir: 80 mg/15 mL (5.3 mg/mL).

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

- ▶ 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.
- ▶ At the beginning of treatment, animal may experience nervousness and stomach upset but these usually go away as the animal's body gets used to the medication.
- ▶ This drug is only effective if given regularly as prescribed; do not skip or double-up doses if you forget to give one.

## How is this medication useful?

Theophylline is used to relax constricted/tight airways to the lungs and help animals breathe better. It is used in conditions such as asthma, coughing, and collapsing trachea in dogs, cats, and ferrets and for heaves in horses. Theophylline may also be used with other medications in the treatment of heart failure and signs associated with elevated pressures in the lungs (pulmonary artery hypertension).

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 theophylline, 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 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 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 related drugs (eg, aminophylline, caffeine, or theobromine). Allergies to theophylline are rare in dogs and cats.

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

- ▶ With irregular heartbeats or heart disease since it can cause the heart to beat too fast.
- ▶ With stomach ulcers, seizure disorders (convulsions), high blood pressure, or thyroid, kidney, or liver disease as it may worsen these conditions.
- ▶ Very young, old, or sick animals may not eliminate the drug from the body very well and toxic effects of theophylline could occur.

If your animal has any of these conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks versus benefits.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

### Common but not serious side effects include:

- ▶ Stomach upset, nervousness, and fast heartbeat. At the beginning of treatment, your animal may experience nervousness and stomach upset but these side effects usually go away as your animal's body gets used to the medication.
- ▶ Increased appetite, thirst, and need to urinate.
- ▶ Horses may become more nervous, have a fast heartbeat, sweat, and be unstable on their feet.

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:

- ▶ Seizures (convulsions).
- ▶ Collapse/passing out.

These signs are rare and often indicate the theophylline dose is too high. Contact your veterinarian immediately if any of these signs occur.

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

Overdoses of theophylline can be very serious. If you witness or suspect an overdose, immediately 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.

approved dosage reminder container (ie, pill minder) at room temperature. Keep away from children and other animals. Overdoses can be serious.

### **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.

- ▶ Theophylline may be given with or without food, but 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.
- ▶ Do not crush or allow animals to chew extended release (timed release) products.
- ▶ Compounded 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.
- ▶ 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 prescription bottle or an

### **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.**