



NON-STEROIDAL ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DRUGS (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs are a very valuable group of drugs used for pain management, often pain associated with arthritis or other joint diseases. The most well-known drugs in this class include aspirin and ibuprofen, which should NOT be used in pets! There are several NSAIDs developed specifically for veterinary use, which are much safer and more effective for pets than their human counterparts.

These drugs work by decreasing inflammation, which directly causes pain (arthritis is literally “inflammation of the skeletal joints”). As is true for all drugs though, there are possible side effects, and these medications should not be used without close monitoring for any possible complications.

Any pet (but especially older ones) can have underlying health problems which may or may not be apparent by looking at them. NSAIDs can be detrimental to the kidneys or liver if they are not functioning normally, so bloodwork prior to using NSAIDs is very important, especially if they are to be used for more than a short period. Once we establish that the organs are healthy, the risk to the pet is minimized. If your pet will need to take an NSAID for the long term to stay comfortable, we will need to monitor bloodwork at least every 6 months.

It is very rare, but these drugs can cause serious liver, kidney, or GI problems. If your pet shows anything out of the ordinary (see list below), discontinue the drug and call the office immediately. It is far more likely that the signs would indicate a mild, correctable side effect, but all could mean a potentially serious problem so please call us if any are seen.

Signs to watch for:

- Decreased appetite
- Lethargy and/or depression
- Vomiting (call immediately if you see blood in the vomit)
- Change in bowel movements, such as diarrhea or black, tarry, or bloody stools
- Change in drinking habits – frequency or amount consumed
- Change in urination habits – frequency, color or smell
- Yellowing of the gums, skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice)

NSAIDs should never be given with aspirin, prednisone (or other corticosteroid), or with a second NSAID. This greatly increases the chance of ulcerating the stomach. If you have a question about your pet’s other medications, don’t hesitate to call.

NSAIDs are generally very well tolerated and can make a huge difference in quality of life for many dogs, they just need to be administered in the safest way possible. Please call with any questions you may have.