

How to give your dog medication

These are suggestions and are not intended to replace the advice of your veterinarian.

The Sugar Trick

I find it's best to prepare a dog as soon as possible for the probability that they may, someday, have to take medication of some sort. I begin right away by sprinkling a tiny bit of sugar on a dog's tongue at least once a day or every other day for a couple of weeks. You'll soon find your dog softening their jaw and maybe even dropping the lower jaw like a baby bird waiting for the sugar. This can also be done with powdered treats, but sugar is usually readily available and easy to use. This tiny bit shouldn't bother any dietary restrictions, but check with your vet if you aren't sure. Preparation like this makes it much easier than wrestling with a dog that suddenly has to take an antibiotic or other medication.

I also prefer to set a dog up for the eventual reality of medication. I put the dog by my side (your preference, but I'm going to describe it as the dog being on the left side, the most common way). I stroke their head and gently take the head in my left hand, sliding down the side of the head to the muzzle, hooking a finger behind the left canine and gently prying the mouth open. I do this a few times without doing anything else.

When I feel the dog is comfortable with me handling the mouth this way, I prepare my right hand to hold some sugar before beginning. I close my fingers firmly together and sprinkle a bit of sugar on my fingers. It naturally tends to go into the groove made in the middle by my fingers pressing together. This is fine. I repeat the above head handling, only this time, I sprinkle the sugar on the dog's tongue. Some dogs will react with surprise. Some will barely notice. Nearly all will smack their lips. Sugar makes their mouths water. That's a good thing when you want them to swallow a pill!

Once you have the dog comfortable with all this, you will use a substitute for a pill – a tiny treat or piece of cheese, but not something very large or very hard. You are going to use the treat exactly like you will eventually give the pill, so follow these instructions for pill giving using my sugar trick.

Find a comfortable spot where there are few distractions. Place the treat/pill on your right hand where the fingers meet the palm and in the center. Sprinkle a small amount of sugar (you may have to use extra for gelatin capsules) down the center trough made by pressing your fingers tightly together. Place your right thumb over the treat/pill, holding it in place. Approach the dog just as before and gently open the mouth. Sprinkle the sugar down the tongue, then release the treat/pill to fall as far into the back

of the mouth/throat as possible. Stroke the dog and hold the head tilted up a bit until the dog swallows. Most dogs will stick their tongues out a bit once they have swallowed. Praise and stroke the dog.

If it's a gelatin capsule, you may need to check the inside of the mouth to make sure it didn't stick to the roof of the mouth. If you've prepared your dog enough, they won't object to this too much. If it's stuck, you will need to put your finger into the mouth and dislodge it to send it down the throat. It's generally best to give a small treat after doing this to leave a "good impression". Be very, very careful of your fingernails when doing this. It's very easy to scratch a dog's throat with long fingernails.

If the dog happens to spit out the pill, pick it up and start over. Remain as calm as possible.

Repeat for each pill, though, if your dog is properly conditioned, you may be able to give more than one at a time with this method.

The Wrap

Using a Pill Pocket, bit of soft cheese, peanut butter or other soft edibles that are easy to mold, wrap it snugly around the pill so that it's difficult to separate the two. Give it to your dog as a treat. Again, it might be useful to do this without a pill a few times so your dog considers these items as a treat.

The Dog Food Sneak

Using canned, fairly firm dog food, mush about a tsp to a TBSP (depending on size of dog and pill) into a ball. Put the pills into the center of the ball. Hand feed this to your dog. If your dog is not used to taking things out of your hand or used to eating canned food, it would be best to prepare them for this before you need it for pill giving.

Liquid Medications

Some medications come in liquid form. Depending on the amount being given, you can give it all at once or split it into smaller amounts. If it's tasty and your dog is still eating well, you might try mixing it with food. Don't ever mix it into an entire dish of dog food as there is a danger the dog might not get it all.

If the medication can be given with a dropper, use the method described with the Sugar Trick to control the dog. (I advise doing this in a bathroom or other room easy to clean!) Take the dropper in the right hand, having already pulled up the proper dose of medication. Pull open the dog's mouth and squirt the medication to the SIDE of the

mouth, not down the throat, which may choke the dog and cause them to fight you. Tilt the head up until the dog swallows the medication.

You can also prepare for liquid medications using a bit of water with some dog food mixed in or a bit of sugar mixed in.

Intravenous or Intramuscular Medications

These are medical procedures in most cases. Any IV medications will most likely be given in the clinic. Please never attempt to give invasive medications (IV, IM or Subcutaneous) without proper training and clean environment.

Your veterinarian may be willing to teach you how to do IM medications – a shot in the muscle. It's not difficult, but things can go wrong quickly and proper training is vital as is proper handling of the medication.

If you know how to do these things on humans, please ask your vet for help in transferring your knowledge to doing them for your dog.

As with everything, perfect practice makes perfect! Don't wait until the last minute. Start training your dog now how to accept medical care and medications calmly. Handle your dog just as your vet needs to. Check their teeth, ears, feet, etc. on a weekly basis. Be proactive! The more familiar you are with your dog, the better you are ready to find anything abnormal before it becomes an emergency. The more prepared you are for giving medications, the less stress there will be for you and your dog.

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