

Amitriptyline

Elavil® is another name for this medication.

How Is This Medication Useful?

- This medication is used to make your pet feel less anxious when it is away from you (separation anxiety) or during certain frightening circumstances (thunderstorms, fireworks).
- Amitriptyline is also useful in stopping some bad behaviors such as urine spraying or excessive biting and chewing of skin. It is occasionally used to help in long term control of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease.
- Amitriptyline is sometimes used to treat chronic pain (especially nerve pain), along with other pain medications. It can also be used for chronic itching, and may reduce the seizure threshold in epileptic animals (i.e., cause seizures to start more easily).

Conditions or Times When Its Use Might Cause More Harm Than Good?

- Amitriptyline may cause dangerous side effects if mixed with certain chemicals such as those found in tick collars (amitraz, or Mitaban®, or Taktik®).
- Amitriptyline should not be used with drugs that are MOA (monoamine oxidase) inhibitors, such as Selegiline (Anipryl®, Deprenyl®). Side effects of this drug interaction can include hyperexcitability, tremors and seizures.
- Certain foods such as aged cheese may also cause this drug to have side effects.
- This medication should not be used in pregnant animals as it has caused birth defects. Amitriptyline crosses into mother's milk and should not be given to mothers who are still nursing babies.
- This medication should be used with caution in diabetic animals as it may alter insulin requirements.
- If this medication is suddenly stopped after being given regularly for a long time, your pet may experience vomiting, anxiety and shaking.
- If your animal has any of the above conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks of using the medication versus the benefits that it might have.
- The following drug interactions with amitriptyline have either been reported. Use together is not necessarily contraindicated, but potential risks should be weighed, and additional monitoring may be needed when appropriate.
 - **Anticholinergic Agents:** Increased effects; fever and constipation are possible.
 - **Cimetidine (Tagamet®):** May inhibit metabolism and increase the risk of toxicity.
 - **Cisapride (Propulsid®):** May have additive effects; possible serious heart arrhythmias.
 - **Central Nervous System (CNS) Depressants:** Increased effects.
 - **Cyproheptadine (Periactin®):** May antagonize the effects.
 - **Diazepam (Valium®):** Possible increased amitriptyline levels.
 - **Itraconazole, Ketoconazole:** Increased levels of amitriptyline possible.
 - **Quinidine:** Increased risk for adverse effects.
 - **Selective-serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (e.g., SSRIs, fluoxetine (Prozac®, Reconcile®):** Potential increased amitriptyline levels, increased risk for side effects.
 - **Sympathomimetic agents:** May increase the risk of cardiac effects (arrhythmias, hypertension, hyperpyrexia).
 - **Thyroid agents:** Increased risk for arrhythmias; monitor.
 - **Tramadol:** Increased risk for serotonin syndrome; veterinary clinical significance is not known.

What Side Effects Can Be Seen With Its Use?

- The most common side effects from amitriptyline are agitation, drowsiness, constipation, urine retention and dry mouth.
- Amitriptyline may also cause blood sugar to either increase or decrease in diabetic patients.
- Some cats may not groom well while taking amitriptyline.
- Very high doses of amitriptyline can cause severe damage to the heart.

How Should It Be Given?

- The successful outcome of your animal's treatment with this medication depends upon your commitment and ability to administer it exactly as the veterinarian has prescribed. Please do not skip doses or stop giving the medication. If you have difficulty giving doses consult your veterinarian or pharmacist who can offer administration techniques or change the dosage form to a type of medication that may be more acceptable to you and your animal.
- Some other drugs can interact with this medication so tell your veterinarian about any drugs or foods that you currently give your animal. Do not give new foods or medications without first asking your veterinarian.
- Dogs and Cats: This medication is usually given to dogs and cats one to two times daily. It may take several weeks before changes in behavior are seen. Do not skip doses. If a dose is missed, do not double doses to catch up as this may increase the undesirable side effects? When the desired effect is reached with this drug, it must not be stopped suddenly. The drug must be tapered off slowly or the animal may suffer uncomfortable symptoms of withdrawal.

What Other Information Is Important About This Medication?

- Tablets and capsules of this medication should be stored at room temperature. Liquids should be stored exactly as the pharmacist has recommended and discarded by the date shown on the prescription bottle.
- PLO gels that attempt to administer amitriptyline by absorption through the skin in cats are not terribly effective when used to administer this drug.
- Overdoses of amitriptyline can be very serious in both humans and animals, causing potentially life threatening heart problems. Be very careful to keep out of the reach of children and animals.

References:

Plumb Veterinary Drug Handbook
Wendy Blount, DVM - PracticalVetMed