Phenobarbital

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SUMMARY:
1) Many pets will be sleepy or drunk on this medication. This usually goes away after about two weeks of starting or changing the dose of this medication.
2) Regular blood work to check drug levels and liver function helps make this medication safe.
3) Many pets will be hungry, thirsty or need to urinate more frequently while on this medication.
4) Never stop or change seizure medication without first speaking with a veterinarian.

EXPLANATION:
Phenobarbital is an anticonvulsant or seizure medication. The goal of this medication is to make your pet's seizure less frequent and less severe. It is unlikely that any seizure medication will make your pet 100% seizure free.

It is very important to give this medication on schedule. Make a note of when you need refills, and try to get them at least one week in advance. Set a timer on your watch or phone to help remind you to give the medication on schedule.

This medication is usually given twice a day, and may be given with or without food.

MONITORING:
Regular vet visits are important while on phenobarbital. We recommend visits twice a year to discuss how your pet is doing. At these visits your vet may want to check blood work.

Before starting phenobarbital we will test liver values to make sure this medication is right for your pet.

Ideally, we like to check phenobarbital drug levels two weeks after starting this medication or changing the dose.

In all pets on this medication we recommend yearly drug levels, general blood work (called a CBC and Chemistry) and a liver test called a bile acids. For the bile acids test your pet will need to not eat anything for 8 hours prior to the appointment and they will be at the clinic for two hours. If this coincides with your pets medication schedule, talk to your vet about how to proceed.

SIDE EFFECTS:
Common Side Effects:
1. Many pets will act sleepy or drunk while their body adjusts to the medication. It can take two weeks for some pets to adjust. If your pet is especially incoordinated, keep them away from things like swimming pools and staircases until they are more sure on their feet.
2. Some pets will be much hungrier on this medication. Monitor the amount of food they are eating. It may be helpful to switch them to a diet food so they can eat more food and not get fat.

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It is also important to watch for inappropriate eating- some dogs will start eating toys or getting into the garbage while they are on this medication.

3. Some pets will be thirsty and will need to urinate more often on this medication. It is important not to restrict their water intake during the day. If they are having accidents overnight, you may pull up their water after dinner-time, but be sure to give them a full bowl of water in the morning.
4. Taking this medication will interfere with common test for thyroid function in dogs. It does not seem to cause hypothyroidism, rather it only changes the results on the blood test. If you believe your pet has a thyroid condition that requires monitoring, discuss this with your veterinarian before starting this medication.
5. This medication will likely cause an increase in your pet's liver enzymes, particularly a test called Alkaline Phosphatase. This alone does not mean your pet has a liver problem. Other test (like a bile acids test) are helpful in making sure that liver changes on blood work are just the normal changes and not a liver problem.

Less Common Side Effects:
1. This medication can cause liver disease. These changes are usually reversible if caught early. If you are especially nervous about this, there are some liver supplements that can be given in conjunction with phenobarbital.
2. This medication can cause problems with red and white blood cells, called dyscrasias. Which can also be found on bloodwork and are usually reversible.
3. Rarely phenobarbital use has been associated with itching or other skin lesions. If you notice an increase in redness or itching, contact your veterinarian.

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