

Compounding Drugs

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If you are confounded by pilling your cat, a compounded medication may be the solution. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, compounding is “the manipulation of a drug, other than in accordance with the FDA approved label, to make a different formulation the drug to meet the needs of a specific patient.” Compounding a drug includes adding flavoring to make it more palatable, creating an oral suspension or injectable solution from crushed tablets, mixing two injectable drugs into one, or creating a transdermal application of a medication not manufactured transdermally. An example of the latter is making a transdermal solution from Tapazole or methimazole (generic tapazole) which can be administered via the ears to treat hyperthyroidism. Compounding may also make a normally unavailable drug available, such as cisapride used to treat constipation in animals by increasing the colon motility.

Compounding changes the delivery mechanism of a drug to make it easier to administer to cats that are difficult to pill. “Compounding may be the only way to get something into the cat,” says Mary Lynch, DVM, director of pharmacy at Cornell University’s College of Veterinary Medicine. Compounding may also increase the absorption time and eliminate potential damage to the cat’s esophagus from dry-swallowing pills.

A cat may need a particular drug to heal, and compounding the drug may be the only way for a owner to get the medication into the cat. “Compounding may increase owner compliance,” says Drew Weigner, DVM, Diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners whose practice is The Cat Doctor in Atlanta, Georgia. “If I instruct a cat owner to do something they can’t do, it won’t help the cat.”

Difficulties and Risks

Compounded drugs are created to meet the needs of a specific patient and fall under the purview of both federal and state guidelines. Some states require compounded drugs to be used in the veterinarian’s office rather than allowing it to be dispensed to the client. The Animal Medicinal Drug Use Clarification Act governs compounding medicine for animals.

While compounding may make the medicine go down in cases where it might not otherwise be ingested or absorbed, compounded drugs are mixtures that do not meet the approval of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). While the FDA has oversight, it is not going to withhold a drug for a specific patient. “The FDA is looking more for illegal drug manufacturing,” says Dr. Weigner, “Compounding drugs for any patient rather than a specific one or making it in large amounts, is crossing the line.”

Compounding may be the only way to get some medications in some cats, but the absorption of manipulated drugs are still largely untested. Creating a liquid from a tablet is most likely most safe and effective compounding, but the dose is less exact and the stability is uncertain. “The main issue is that the effects of compounding are unknown for most drugs,” says Dr. Weigner.

Cats with hyperthyroidism may be prescribed a transdermal formula for taking medication that is administered by rubbing the gel on the inside of the cat’s ear. While this may be more acceptable to the cat, its absorption may not be as good as giving the medication in pill form. Study results have been mixed.

Transdermal medications have a potential hazard to people who administer the drug to their cats. “If it can be absorbed through the animal’s skin, it can be absorbed through the person’s skin,

particularly if it is used every day," says Dr. Lynch. To avoid absorbing the medication yourself, wear gloves or wash your hands immediately following application. "In most cases, small quantities won't hurt you but you may become allergic to it," says Dr. Weigner.

Alternatives

If you have doubts about whether your cat can take medicine in the prescribed form, discuss it with your veterinarian. Some medication comes in liquid form rather than tablets which may be more acceptable to you and your cat. Others can be mixed in food. If the medication is tasteless, your cat probably won't notice, but some taste terrible, and your cat will resist food with the drug mixed in. Some medications are manufactured with flavorings such as tuna which appeal to cats. Mixing medication in food does not constitute compounding. "Mixing in food can't be done with every drug," cautions Dr. Weigner, "but it's less expensive and legitimate to do."

If you must crush a pill to mix with your cat's dinner, crush it completely. If the dose contains chunks of uncrushed medication, your cat is likely to find them and spit them out or eat around them. "Crush the pill completely and mix it with something strong-tasting the cat likes, such as tuna or liverwurst," says Dr. Weigner. "Feed the cat when the cat is hungry and mix it in a small amount of food so they eat it all."

Final Thoughts

Compounded drugs should be prescribed by a veterinarian although a pharmacist may create the compounded form. They should be used only in situations where the use and effectiveness have been tested and for those cats who resist taking the drug in the manufactured form. In most cases, your veterinarian will deal with a specific pharmacy that compounds the drug according to the veterinarian's specifications, but you may have to find a pharmacy on your own. "Know who you're dealing with," says Dr. Lynch. "Check out the company."

Like all medications, shelf life is finite, so store it according to your veterinarian's instructions. "There should be an expiration date on the prescription," says Dr. Lynch. "The medication can deteriorate over time."

As with all medications, use of compounded formulas for your cat should be monitored and any problems or side effects reported to your veterinarian.