Aspirin Toxicity in Dogs

Overview

Aspirin is a drug that has many benefits for both pets and people; unfortunately, it can also be dangerous. Dog owners should never give their best friends aspirin unless advised by their veterinarian.

Symptoms

Dogs with aspirin toxicity get sick fast. One of the first signs is a lack of appetite; you may also see vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and fever. There may be red blood in the vomit, or flecks of digested blood that resemble coffee grounds. If you see dark, tarry feces, this is called “melena” and represents digested blood from the small intestine or stomach. Sometimes, the central nervous system is also affected, and your dog may have trouble walking; he may seem weak or even "drunk."

Diagnosis/Treatment

If you suspect your dog has ingested aspirin, call your veterinarian immediately. She or he may recommend tests to determine how severe the toxicity is.

These tests may include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count to identify if your dog is anemic and to check his clotting function
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog isn't dehydrated or suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- A urinalysis to rule out urinary tract abnormalities and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine

If it is determined that your pet has aspirin toxicity, your veterinarian will begin treatment immediately to reduce the impact of the toxicity and to provide supportive care. He or she may recommend hospitalization and monitoring blood tests to ensure your dog becomes stable.

Prevention

The best way to prevent the toxicity of any drug is to make sure you keep all medications away from your pet. If aspirin has been prescribed to your dog by your veterinarian, make sure you watch carefully for any adverse signs. Remember: some dogs are “Hoovers”—they will eat anything, so all dangerous or toxic items should be kept out of their reach.