

These protocols contain general advice on those animal-related matters which, in Collier County Domestic Animal Service's experience, affect animal lovers and pet owners most often.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to take into account individual situations or consider unusual problems or circumstances. Accordingly, Collier County and its representatives are not liable for any claims or damages which may result from the access and use of these protocols and of the information contained therein.

If you are concerned about the welfare of a particular animal, you should seek further advice and assistance from your veterinarian, or other appropriate expert.

Antianxiety Medications

The first step for any medical treatment is to contact your veterinarian for more information. Anti-anxiety medications are not tranquilizers. They reduce anxiety, but don't sedate the pet. They work by boosting the usable levels of Serotonin and, sometimes, Dopamine, two neurotransmitters in the brain. This process helps to reduce anxiety. It's important to discuss an antianxiety medication regimen *fully with your veterinarian*, before stopping or starting your pet on this medication. Only your veterinarian can decide which is the best medication, proper doses, discuss side effects, how long you can expect your pet to be on the medication, and the proper procedures for weaning your pet off, once it's decided to stop the medication. Your veterinarian will possibly want to do some blood tests to check things like liver function—but that is for your veterinarian to decide.

That being said, here is some general information about antianxiety (aka anxiolytics) medications:

1. The goal of placing your pet on antianxiety medication is to reduce its anxiety enough so that it can learn the appropriate responses we want it to learn, and then wean it off the medication when it no longer needs it. It's similar to school test anxiety in people—if we are too anxious, we cannot concentrate on what we know, or what we are trying to learn, because the anxiety distracts us. The medication reduces the anxiety so we can better focus. If you choose to do this, expect that your pet will be on this medication for at least 6 months and possibly a year, depending on your veterinarian's recommendation, and suggestions from your animal behaviorist or trainer.
2. Antianxiety medication is *not* a “magic fix-it pill.” You will still want to do the recommended behavior modification program with your pet, in order for it to learn better behaviors than those caused by its anxiety. So there is still work to do. The medication will make it easier for the pet to concentrate on the learning process.
3. The pet may show some side effects during this time, including lethargy, loss of appetite, stomach upset, dizziness, and such. Your pet may appear tranquilized or sedated initially, but this should only last a few weeks. Be sure to discuss these with your veterinarian if the side effects do not seem to improve with time. Initially, there is an adaptation period (usually lasting 4-6 weeks) while the pet gets used to being on the medication. It takes this long for the medication reaches its maximum effect.
4. When/if you decide to wean your dog off the medication, you need to get a weaning-off schedule from your veterinarian and reduce the dose gradually over a period of weeks. You can't just stop the meds (don't do “cold turkey”), as this can produce a negative rebound effect and cause the anxiety to reoccur strongly. Also know that these medications are not a “magic pill.” Any dog placed on an anti-anxiety medication must have behavior modification training in conjunction with the medication in order for the program to be effective.

There are several possibilities: Prozac (Fluoxetine), Elavil (Amitriptyline), and BusBar (Buspirone), Clomicalm (Clomipramine), Xanax (Alpraxolam), and others. Veterinary behaviorists are beginning to recommend against Acepromazine, as it has been shown to cause hallucinations in animals. Valium (a tranquilizer) is not recommended, as this has been known to produce a “paradoxical” effect, causing a pet to bite more instead of less.

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