

# Alprazolam

**BRAND NAME: XANAX**

AVAILABLE IN  
0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg  
TABLETS

## BACKGROUND

Alprazolam, like diazepam (valium®), its more famous cousin, is a benzodiazepine tranquilizer. It works by depressing activity in several areas of the brain which leads to several desired effects. It works as an anti-anxiety treatment, as a sedative, as a suppressor of seizure activity, and as a muscle relaxer. The exact mechanism for creating these effects remains unknown. Alprazolam represents an improvement on the original diazepam in that it lasts longer in dogs making it more practical than diazepam for oral use.

## HOW THIS MEDICATION IS USED

The most common veterinary use for this medication is probably the treatment of panic disorders in dogs. Panic disorders differ from other forms of anxiety in that they have a more acute basis and seem to be associated with loud noise stimuli (like fireworks or thunderstorms). Typically a single dose of alprazolam could relax a dog on the evening of the fourth of July or during a single storm and on-going medication would not be needed to see an effect (other anti-anxiety medications require weeks of use for results and would not be helpful in these types of short term unique situations).

Other uses might include anxiety disorders in cats such as with inappropriate elimination.

Alprazolam is also sometimes used to supplement seizure control medications such as phenobarbital when one medication alone is inadequate.

Alprazolam seems to exert its maximum effect within 1-2 hours.

## SIDE EFFECTS

Sedation is a possible side effect.

In the cat, cases of liver failure have been reported after several days use of diazepam and since alprazolam is closely related a similar reaction is possible. It would be a good idea to check a cat's liver enzymes prior to the institution of therapy and again a few days after starting therapy. Any increase in enzymes precludes the use of oral alprazolam in such a patient.

## INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER DRUGS

Alprazolam may have a stronger than expected effect if used in conjunction with Cimetidine (an antacid more commonly known as Tagamet), erythromycin (an antibiotic), ketoconazole (an antifungal drug), itraconazole (another antifungal drug), or propranolol (a heart medication).

Antacids may slow the onset of effect of alprazolam.

The use of alprazolam may increase the effect of digoxin (a heart medication).

## CONCERNS AND CAUTIONS

- This medication should be stored at room temperature and protected from light.
- Liver disease can prolong the activity of alprazolam. Alprazolam should be used with caution or not at all in patients with liver or kidney insufficiency.
- There is a risk of using anti-anxiety medications such as this in aggressive animals as a phenomenon called “disinhibition” may be observed. What this means is that the medication may remove whatever inhibitions were still present to suppress aggression and the situation can be aggravated now that the patient is no longer inhibited.

**DO NOT ADMINISTER A PET'S FIRST DOSE EVER OF ALPRAZOLAM  
AND THEN LEAVE HIM UNSUPERVISED.  
ALWAYS SUPERVISE A TEST DOSE TO BE SURE PETS ARE NOT  
OVER-TRANQUILIZED OR AGGRESSIVE WITH ONE ANOTHER.**

- Discontinuing alprazolam therapy abruptly may lead to unpleasant withdrawal symptoms similar to those that occur in humans.
- Alprazolam should not be used in early pregnancy; birth defects have been reported.
- Alprazolam also crosses readily into the milk of nursing mothers and may tranquilize nursing young. Alprazolam should thus not be used in nursing mothers.

**ALPRAZOLAM IS A CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE  
AND SPECIAL RECORDS MUST BE KEPT  
BY DOCTORS PRESCRIBING IT.**



## Mar Vista Animal Medical Center

3850 Grand View Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90066 • (310) 391-6741 • Fax: (310) 391-6744

Additional drug and general pet care information can be found on our world wide web site:

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