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The Owner's Role in Beardie Health

*Information in this article is based on a great article
in the July 2007 DVM Magazine written by Carl A. Osborne DVM, PhD.*

Submitted by Linda Aronson, DVM

Your veterinarian can only do so much, and so often a dog's health suffers because owners don't follow their veterinarian's advice. OK your vet isn't always right, but medication not given can't do any good, so you need to make sure that the right medication (check the label every time) is given to the right patient (if you have multiple Beardies) at the right time(s), in the right amount and dosage form, by the correct route of administration and for the right duration of time. Owners should know what the hoped for response to the medicine will be and how soon they can expect to see it. They should be aware of possible adverse reactions and appropriate actions to take if they occur. If a recheck is scheduled make sure you get there, and if a referral to a specialist is recommended follow through on that too.

Here are some other important things owners can do to make sure their Beardie gets well and stays that way.

Know the generic and brand names of the drug(s) your dog is getting. Know why the drug(s) are being given. Know the possible benefits and risks of generic substitutes. For example these are generally cheaper, but may not be exact replicas of the brand name drug. This seems to be true of thyroid drugs, for example, where generics do not always have the labeled amount of L-thyroxine so the results aren't optimal.

Before you give any drug make sure you understand all the instructions – how to give it, how much, how often, and whether it is best before, with or after meals – or if it doesn't matter. Before you leave the hospital make sure you have a demonstration of how to administer the drug, and make sure you or someone else in the family is capable of administering the drug in the correct fashion. If necessary schedule trips to the hospital so that the techs can medicate your dog. Once again, if the dog doesn't get it, it doesn't do any good. In this vein, get into the habit of checking to make sure those Beardies with the silver tongues that reach back down into their tummies haven't spat the darned pills out. Like us, dogs may experience pills stuck in their esophagus – which they may cough back up later - so if possible have your dog take a drink of water after you give him his pills.



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Do remember to ask which foods and liquids are compatible and more importantly, incompatible with the medication. Owners often like to try and hide medication in food, and sometimes this can interfere with absorption or change the chemical properties of the drug. For instance, tetracyclines, including doxycycline, should not be given with cheese. Unless instructed to do so, don't add a drug to the drinking water. Dogs don't usually drain the bowl so the amount of drug delivered will be variable and probably inadequate. The drug may also change the taste of the water and discourage consumption.

If your dog is on multiple medications it may help to put them in a daily pill dispenser to make sure he gets everything every day. Keeping a written diary of what was given and when each day may also be helpful in making sure everything is delivered at the right time.

If the therapy may produce adverse reactions do not give it with food. Bad tasting pills in the food or feeling nauseous or odd may make the dog food aversive. Many conditions result in anorexia as it is, and you don't want to exacerbate that risk.

Do know ahead of times what to do if you forget to give a dose or are unable to give the medication at the prescribed time or interval. Also ask what to do if you find a rejected dose or if the dog vomits (ask about the timing of this relative to medicating too). Make sure you know about important side-effects of the drug. Know how often they occur and which require returning to the hospital or calling the veterinarian. Ask about drug interactions, especially if the dog is on multiple medications and/or herbal or vitamin supplements. If you get the drug at a human pharmacy they may list potential problems for humans that could be different for canine patients.

If symptoms persist, or especially if they become worse, or if new problems arise, do not hesitate to call your veterinarian.

Do use the dispensing spoon, syringe or cup given with liquid medicines. Other devices – droppers, teaspoons etc. - may not be as specifically calibrated. Keep medications in their original container, and don't mix medicines, as they may affect each other, and if you return to the container later you may give the wrong pill.

Don't break or crush capsules or pills unless instructed to do so. If pills must be split always use a precision pill splitter available at most pharmacies.



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Medicines should be stored correctly in terms of heat, humidity and light, as this can affect potency in many instances. It is important not to store medicines near stoves or other heat sources, sinks or the bathroom. I know, we all have “medicine cabinets” in our bathrooms, but think of the humidity from the shower, heat from the hair dryer, and maybe you’ll move the people drugs out too! Don’t leave cotton plugs in medicines once you break the seal. Cotton can draw moisture into the vial. Don’t keep your Beardie’s medicine alongside people drugs. It’s too easy for you both to get the wrong drug, even though I know you’ll now be reading the label every time you give a dose!

It’s important to only give the scripted amount unless you have first consulted with your veterinarian. Some drugs have a very limited range of safety. Do not abruptly stop giving the drug because the symptoms have cleared up. It is necessary to slowly wean the dog off some drugs. Other drugs need to be continued until all the medication has been given – this is especially true of antibiotics. Do call in refills in plenty of time so that you don’t run out of medication for long term therapy. Examine each new batch carefully. If it looks different or smells off, immediately alert your veterinarian and/or pharmacist to the change.

While the expiration dates on most drugs are ultra conservative, do consult your veterinarian if the drug has passed its expiration date. If any drug has changed color, absorbed moisture or otherwise obviously degraded discard it carefully. If an old condition recurs, always consult your veterinarian before starting to treat with drugs on hand.

Finally, do not give an over-the-counter or on-line product to your Beardie without first consulting with your veterinarian to make sure that it is safe and effective. Even old stand-bys may present a problem. For example Kaopectate was recently reformulated and the new formula may be toxic to some dogs.

Always put your dog’s safety foremost, follow directions, and if the veterinarian did her/his job of diagnosis correctly, you should have a happy healthy Beardie who continues to bounce into his/her golden years.