



My Pet...Naturally

RIMADYL RISK - BE AWARE

This is an article from the Natural Rearing Newsletter

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Rimadyl (Carprofen) is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) manufactured by Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, intended for the relief of pain and inflammation in dogs. Since its introduction in January 1997, it has become a favorite of veterinarians for use with osteoarthritis. It is also commonly prescribed in other situations such as post-operative pain. There is no doubt that it is an effective painkiller (more dramatic than aspirin) that has brought relief to many dogs.

There is however, a serious risk of side effects that you or your veterinarian may not be aware of. Some dogs have died due to the unexpectedly rapid onset of side effects, and/or because the drug's side effects were not recognized by the attending veterinarian who did not take appropriate action!

Over the last couple of years I have been hearing some real horror stories about this drug from breeders all over the country. These "true life" stories are only anecdotal and in most cases the veterinarians involved were absolutely certain that Rimadyl simply couldn't be the causative factor. Here are some facts to consider that you may want to pass along to your veterinarian.

In the January/February 1999 "FDA Veterinarian" report, Rimadyl ranks #1 for Adverse Drug Experiences!! It accounted for approximately 33% of all incidents reported for the year 1997 (they haven't compiled 1998 yet).

In its literature, Pfizer suggests (but does not say it is required) that veterinarians pre-screen a dog before prescribing Rimadyl and then re-test and closely monitor the dog for possible toxic reactions at periodic intervals.

A baseline test should be done to determine whether your dog has existing liver or kidney disease. If a pre-existing condition exists, your vet definitely SHOULD NOT PRESCRIBE Rimadyl. However, baseline tests will not tell the vet whether your dog will experience toxicity to the drug once he starts taking it. There is no way to predict an adverse drug reaction if your dog's liver and kidney functions are normal. Thus close monitoring is essential whenever Rimadyl is used. Adverse reactions have been reported after a matter of hours and also after a period of months. In cases where dogs have had toxic reactions and recovered, continued monitoring over an extended period (perhaps as long as a year) may be advisable because the long-term effects of liver or other organ damage are not yet known.

Carprofen (the chemical name for Rimadyl) is not recommended for animals with known bleeding disorders and should not be used if a dog has pre-existing liver disease, inflammatory bowel disease or a known tendency towards gastrointestinal ulceration.

Rimadyl should never be given along with any other NSAID such as aspirin or along with any corticosteroid hormones such as prednisone, prednisolone or dexamethasone.

Before you decide to use Rimadyl, be aware of how it works. It acts by inhibiting prostaglandins that cause inflammation in injured or aging joints. However, prostaglandins are also necessary for normal body functions. When their production is stopped, normal body functions, such as those carried out in the digestive system, liver and kidneys are disturbed. Internal bleeding can occur in the gastrointestinal tract because the stomach lining becomes eroded or ulcerated. Blood flow to the liver can be decreased, causing toxins to build up in the body. The resulting hemorrhaging and/or toxicity can lead to death if not reversed in time. Unfortunately, although the drug supposedly is eliminated from the dog's system shortly after administration is stopped, by that time, irreversible damage may have been done.



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After carefully weighing the risks, if you decide your dog may benefit from Rimadyl, tell your vet that you want to determine the lowest possible dosage that can be used to obtain relief. Insist on baseline tests and continued monitoring of the relevant functions during the entire time your dog takes the drug.

At home, as soon as your dog begins Rimadyl therapy and during the entire time he takes it, watch for the following symptoms, all signs of potential life-threatening reactions to the drug:

1. Loss of appetite
2. Refusal to drink
3. Unusual pattern of urination, blood in the urine, sweet smelling urine, an overabundance of urine, urine accidents in the house
4. Vomiting
5. Diarrhea
6. Black, tarry stool or flecks of blood in the vomit
7. Lethargy, drowsiness, hyperactivity, restlessness, aggressiveness
8. Staggering, stumbling, weakness or partial paralysis, full paralysis, seizures, dizziness, loss of balance

In the presence of any of these symptoms IMMEDIATELY STOP the drug and take your dog to the vet. The earlier you catch the problem the better the chances of recovery.

If you think your dog is having a toxic reaction but your vet disagrees, call Pfizer right away (1-800-366-5288) for confirmation.

You should also watch for: panting or pacing; excessive shedding; hot spots; facial swelling or hives; any signs of jaundice such as yellowing of the whites of the eyes; or signs of internal bleeding such as white gums.

Please remember that your veterinarian may not have been alerted to the side effects of Rimadyl and the number and type of side effects that have been reported. Pfizer has not done a particularly good job in ensuring that vets are aware of the risks involved.

Marina Zacharias