

Common Apoquel Mistakes

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Apoquel is a ground-breaking new treatment to reduce itching in dogs. However, it has limitations. It can be useless in some situations, and it can even be harmful in other situations.

Here are some mistakes to avoid...

*Puppies. Avoid using Apoquel in dogs less than 1 year of age. Apoquel can cause demodicosis if it is used in puppies. In cases where an immunosuppressant is needed, 0.25-0.5mg/kg prednisone q 48 hrs is less likely to cause serious side effects than Apoquel.

*Automatically assuming atopic dermatitis. It is best to determine if itching is due to fleas, mites, dermatophyte, cutaneous lymphoma, food allergy or atopy rather than prescribing Apoquel as a catch-all. It is ok to use Apoquel as a long-term treatment for atopic dermatitis; however, it is best to rule out all other causes of itching first.

*Failure rate. Apoquel does not work for every dog. Roughly 80% of dogs with atopic dermatitis will respond to Apoquel. Conversely, 20% of dogs with atopic dermatitis do not respond to Apoquel.

*Keep using it when it's not working. Apoquel takes effect within 1 to 2 days. If Apoquel is not controlling the itching within a week, then there is no point in continuing to administer it.

*Infections. Itching often persists despite Apoquel if pyoderma or yeast dermatitis is present. Clinicians should be sure to perform surface cytology to check for the presence of infections.

*Bloodwork. Apoquel has potential for side effects. It can cause hepatotoxicity and bone marrow suppression in a small percentage of dogs. Most dogs tolerate Apoquel well, but some dogs simply do not. At McKeever Dermatology Clinics, we check a baseline CBC/chemistry, followed by a CBC/chemistry after 1 month of using Apoquel. We also check a CBC/chemistry/urinalysis after 6 months of Apoquel use, and then yearly thereafter. If a side effect occurs, withdrawing the drug leads to resolution.

*Combining with other immunosuppressive drugs. The long-term use of Apoquel combined with any other immunosuppressive drug has not been studied. Apoquel should be combined with other immunosuppressive drugs for only a very short duration (i.e. 2 weeks). Only in cases of last resort should Apoquel be combined long-term with other immunosuppressive drugs.

*Cats. Apoquel is not well studied in cats, and the risk of side effects is unknown. There are undoubtedly situations where Apoquel is a good option for cats with atopic dermatitis; however, all other treatment options should be exhausted first.