Digoxin

Lanoxin® and Cardoxin® are other names for this medication.

How Is This Medication Useful?
- In animals with congestive heart failure, Digoxin is used to help the heart beat more strongly and move blood through the body better.
- It is also used to treat certain types of heart rhythm disturbances.
- Because of its potential for toxicity and the availability of other drugs to treat heart problems in animals, this drug is being used less often now.

Are There Conditions or Times When Its Use Might Cause More Harm Than Good?
- This drug must not be given to animals who already have too much in their bloodstream. Digoxin toxicity can be fatal.
- Digoxin must not be used in animals who have ventricular fibrillation.
- Collie-breed dogs may be more sensitive to the central nervous system effects of digoxin and it should be used cautiously in those breeds.
- Many veterinary cardiologists feel that digoxin should not be used in cats with a certain type of heart disease (hypertrophic cardiomyopathy) as it may make the disease worse.
- Digoxin must be used very cautiously in animals with kidney disease, severe lung disease, and thyroid disease.
- Digoxin must be used very carefully in animals whose electrolytes (sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium) in their bloodstream are out of balance.
- While digoxin is used to treat heart failure, there are several heart conditions where it must be used very cautiously. Your veterinarian will discuss the risks of using this drug when those conditions are present.

What Side Effects Can Be Seen With Its Use?
- Most side effects of digoxin occur when there is too much drug in the bloodstream. These effects can range from mild gastrointestinal effects (lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea), to lethargy (lacking energy) or behavior changes to serious heart rhythm abnormalities. Because digoxin toxicity can be very serious, contact your veterinarian immediately if your animal develops any of these signs so that he or she can be sure that the medication is not becoming toxic to your animal.
- Digoxin can cause some gastrointestinal effects (lack of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea) without blood levels being too high, but contact your veterinarian to be sure.
- Cats may be more sensitive to the side effects of digoxin than are dogs.

How Should It Be Given?
- The successful outcome of your animal's treatment with this medication depends upon your commitment and ability to administer it exactly as the veterinarian has prescribed. Please do not skip doses or stop giving the medication. If you have difficulty giving doses consult your veterinarian or pharmacist who can offer administration techniques or change the dosage form to a type of medication that may be more acceptable to you and your animal.
- If you miss a dose of this medication you should give it as soon as you remember it, but if it is within a few hours of the regularly scheduled dose, wait and give it at the regular time. Do not double a dose, as this can be toxic to your pet.
- Many other drugs interact with this medication, you should tell your veterinarian about any drugs or foods that you currently give your animal. Do not give new foods or medications without first asking your veterinarian.
- It is important to monitor the amount of digoxin and electrolytes (sodium, potassium, calcium, chloride) in your animal's blood, both to maximize the drug's therapeutic benefit and to minimize the risk of toxicity. Your veterinarian will want to schedule these tests to be performed while your animal is taking digoxin.
- **Dogs and Cats:** Dogs usually receive this drug orally twice daily. Cats usually receive this drug orally twice daily to once every other day.
- **Horses:** Digoxin may be used twice daily once the horse is stabilized. It is considered a Class 4 drug by the Association of Racing Commissioners International (ARCI).
- **Ferrets:** Digoxin is given orally once or twice a day to ferrets.

What Other Information Is Important About This Medication?
- The veterinary labeled digoxin elixir (Cardoxin®) is available in two separate strengths. One is three times more concentrated than the other so do not confuse the two.
- Cats generally dislike the taste of the oral elixirs.
- Digoxin products should be stored at room temperature in a tight, light resistant, childproof container away from all children and other household pets.
- If you switch between the veterinary brands and human brands, consult your veterinarian for advice on monitoring your pet during the change.