

# Phenobarbital

Luminal®, Solfoton® and phenobarbitone are other names for this medication.

## How Is This Medication Useful?

- Phenobarbital is used to control seizures in animals with epilepsy. Because it also causes drowsiness, it has sometimes been used as a tranquilizer/sedative in animals.

## Are There Conditions or Times When Its Use Might Cause More Harm Than Good?

- Phenobarbital should not be used in animals that are allergic to it or to drugs like it.
- Phenobarbital is removed from the body by the liver and should be used with extreme caution in animals with liver disease. Phenobarbital may also cause liver disease at higher doses.
- Phenobarbital decreases the ability of the lungs to function properly. It should be used very carefully in animals who have lung disease or lung conditions. Dogs and cats use panting from the lungs to cool themselves, as they cannot sweat. Depressing breathing can not only cause oxygen shortage, but also can cause animals to overheat.
- Phenobarbital has effects on many laboratory tests. Your veterinarian may want to take your animal off phenobarbital prior to doing some tests. You should always remind your veterinarian that your pet is on phenobarbital before performing laboratory tests.
- If your animal has any of the above conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks of using the medication versus the benefits that it might have.

## What Side Effects Can Be Seen With Its Use?

- Phenobarbital most commonly causes tiredness at the beginning of treatment. Some animals will also experience agitation and anxiety at the beginning or treatment. Call your veterinarian if these side effects do not appear to be getting better with time.
- Many animals will eat more, drink more and urinate more when taking phenobarbital.
- Phenobarbital may cause liver damage in higher doses and the dose must be reduced or phenobarbital stopped completely. This is more common in dogs and not very common in cats.
- Phenobarbital also stimulates the production of certain liver enzymes that may indicate the beginning of liver failure. Your veterinarian will want to monitor your pet very closely while on phenobarbital to make sure than none of these side effects are happening.
- Phenobarbital has also rarely suppressed the bone marrow and caused anemias.

## How Should It Be Given?

- Phenobarbital may be given by injection at your veterinary clinic or orally at home as a tablet, capsule, liquid, paste or chewable treat. If your cat is extremely difficult to medicate, your veterinarian may prescribe a special topical gel of phenobarbital that can be rubbed into the ears to get into the bloodstream. If you use this topical gel, you must wear gloves while applying and wash hands afterwards. If your job requires you to take random drug tests, you may want to have someone else apply the phenobarbital gel as it may also get into your bloodstream and cause you to fail your blood test. It is usually given twice daily and must be given for the rest of the animal's life or seizures may return.
- 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.
- Some other drugs can interact with this medication so 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.
- **Dogs and Cats:** Dogs and cats usually receive phenobarbital orally once or twice daily. It must be given for life to control epilepsy.
- **Horses:** Horses with seizures can be very dangerous to themselves and others. Phenobarbital is rarely used for long term in horses, but when used is given once daily. It is considered a Class 2 Drug by the Association of Racing Commissioners International (ARCI).

## What Other Information Is Important About This Medication?

- Phenobarbital should be stored in a tight, light resistant, childproof container away from all children and other household pets.
- Phenobarbital is a Schedule IV controlled substance. You will need to get a new prescription from your veterinarian once every 6 months.