



Medicine series

Practice details

# Salbutamol

- Keep this leaflet safe, as you may need to refer to it again.
- Please ask your vet or veterinary nurse if you have any further questions.
- This medicine has been prescribed for your pet ONLY. Do not take it yourself or give it to another person or any other animal; it may harm them even if their symptoms appear to be the same.

The medicine you have been given for your dog or cat is called salbutamol. It may have a trade name such as Ventolin®, but often will just be called salbutamol.

## What is salbutamol?

Salbutamol belongs to a group of medicines that are called bronchodilators. These drugs relax the walls of the airways in the lung, thereby widening them and allowing greater airflow in and out of the lungs.

## Why has my pet been prescribed salbutamol?

Vets use salbutamol inhalers to improve the breathing of pets that are suffering from conditions causing constriction of their lower airways, such as asthma in cats. It starts to improve breathing within 5 minutes and the effects last 4 to 6 hours.

## How should I store salbutamol?

This medicine does not require special storage conditions. For safety, **all medicines should be kept out of the reach and sight of children.**

## How do I give salbutamol to my pet?

Your vet may advise you to give salbutamol at regular intervals or only when your pet is showing symptoms of respiratory distress such as breathing fast, coughing or breathing with its mouth open. If you see these signs, then give salbutamol as soon as possible. Salbutamol is given via an aerosol chamber, insert the inhaler into one end of the chamber and place the mask at the other end of the chamber over your pet's mouth and nose, ensuring a snug fit. Firmly push down once on the vial of salbutamol to squirt one dose into the chamber. Allow your pet to breathe normally. As they breathe in, you will hear a click as the valve opens. Hearing five to six clicks (breaths) is enough to know that your pet has taken the dose. Some animals need more than one dose at a time; your vet will advise you about this. **DO NOT** use salbutamol more frequently than prescribed by your vet. **DO NOT** repeat doses within less than 4 hours.

It is important that your pet is relaxed about receiving the drug in this way. It is helpful to practise putting the mask, with or without the aerosol chamber, over their mouth (without administering the inhaler) initially to build trust. **If the mask does not fit snugly, ask your vet for another one.** Stroking the pet's head while practising with the mask or using the inhaler will reassure them. After practising or using the inhaler, give the pet a reward, for example, a small treat or extra play time/attention. Most animals tolerate this procedure following gradual acclimatization and practice. However, if your pet will still not allow you to do this after 5 days, please seek advice from your vet.

## How long will my pet need to use salbutamol?

Your vet will advise you on the length of time for which you will need to use this medicine. This may vary between patients.

## What should I do if I run out of vials?

Try not to run out. Make sure you order more vials from your vet if your supply is getting low. Each vial gives about 200 doses. It is a good idea to have a **spare** vial. If you do run out, contact your vet **immediately** for further advice.

## What should I do if I miss a dose?

Salbutamol is often only used when your pet is showing symptoms of bronchoconstriction. When given regularly, if a dose is missed, give the medication as soon as possible. However, it is best to skip the missed dose if it is almost time for your pet's next scheduled dose. **DO NOT** give a double dose to make up for the missed dose and do not exceed the total stated dose in any one 24-hour period.

## What should I do if my pet is accidentally given too much salbutamol?

**Contact your vet immediately** as large overdoses of salbutamol can be potentially life-threatening, causing irregular heartbeats and severe metabolic abnormalities.

## Can my pet take salbutamol if I am already giving them other drugs?

Tell your vet if you are giving your pet any other medications, even if you think they already know. This includes herbal or off-the-shelf remedies from a pet shop, pharmacy or health store. There is an increased risk of side effects if your pet is already taking diuretics, digoxin, theophylline or corticosteroids. If you have any concerns about using salbutamol with other medications, please ask your vet for further advice.

## What are the possible side effects of salbutamol for my pet?

There is limited information available about the side effects of salbutamol in dogs and cats. Shivering and agitation are occasionally seen in dogs. In people it can cause headache, muscle cramps, a fast or irregular heartbeat, sleep disturbances and changes in behaviour. If your pet shows **any** unusual symptoms whilst taking this medication, please contact your vet.

## The Prescribing Cascade

This medicine is authorized for use in human patients and is used by vets under the 'prescribing cascade'. The medicine is not authorized by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), for use in dogs/cats/pets. Your vet can explain the 'prescribing cascade' in further detail to you and also explain why they are prescribing this drug for your pet. You will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you understand the reasons that the drug is being prescribed and its possible complications, before the treatment is issued.

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### **What should I do if my pet is unwell when given salbutamol?**

If your pet's breathing does not start improving after using salbutamol, you should continue to use it but also contact your vet as soon as possible for advice. If your pet shows other signs of being unwell while receiving medication, you should not give any further doses of salbutamol and should contact your vet as soon as possible for advice.

### **What should I do if a person accidentally takes this drug?**

If a person accidentally takes your pet's medication, the person should be taken to the local hospital **immediately**. Take this leaflet and the inhaler (even if it is empty) with you.