

# Melphalan

- 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 melphalan. It may have a trade name such as Alkeran®, but often will just be called melphalan.

## What is melphalan?

Melphalan belongs to a group of medicines called alkylating drugs, which are a type of cytotoxic drug. Cytotoxic drugs have both anti-cancer activity and the potential to damage normal tissue; their use is sometimes referred to as 'chemotherapy'. They may be used to help manage/treat cancer. Cytotoxic drugs are often used in combination with several other drugs and may be used alongside radiotherapy or surgery to treat cancer.

## Why has my pet been prescribed melphalan?

Melphalan is used in veterinary patients to treat certain types of cancer affecting blood cells and lymphoid tissue. Lymphoid tissue includes small glands around the body (lymph nodes), the spleen, tonsils, adenoids and bone marrow. It is part of the body's immune system that helps protect it against infections. Melphalan may also be used to treat some solid tumours.

## How should I store melphalan?

Store in a closed, light-proof container in a refrigerator 2–8°C. The bottle or box should be clearly labelled as containing cytotoxic medication (e.g. with cytotoxic warning tape). For safety, **all medicines should be kept out of the reach and sight of children and in a childproof container.**

## How do I give melphalan tablets to my pet?

**Disposable gloves should be worn at all times when handling this drug. DO NOT split or crush these tablets; only use whole ones.** Melphalan should be given to your pet on an empty stomach – at least 6 hours after eating. Try to disguise the tablet(s) in a small amount of strongly flavoured food that your pet likes. If this is not possible, then the tablet(s) can be placed carefully on the back of your pet's tongue and their mouth held closed until the entire dose has been swallowed. Please consult your vet before doing this as they may be able to offer some practical tips to avoid handling the drug. **Faeces, urine and saliva from dogs and cats taking melphalan will contain small traces of the drug. Therefore, do not allow your pet to lick your skin (including your hands and face) and make sure they go to the toilet well away from other pets and from people. Wear disposable gloves when picking up faeces in bags. Dispose of faeces in domestic waste. Dogs should be walked in quiet areas. Do not allow them to soil areas where children will be playing or where there is a high dog population. Use a bottle of water to dilute down any urine passed on solid surfaces (e.g. pavements or concrete).**

## 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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## How long will my pet need to take melphalan?

Your vet will advise you on the length of time for which you will need to give this medicine. This may vary between patients. Unused tablets and empty containers should be returned to your veterinary practice for safe disposal.

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

Try not to run out of tablets. Make sure you order more tablets from your vet if your supply is getting low. If you do run out, contact your own vet for further advice and restart the course as soon as possible.

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

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 many doses?

**Contact your vet immediately** if your pet receives an overdose of melphalan.

## Can my pet take melphalan 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.

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

Cytotoxic drugs, such as melphalan, have the potential to cause a sore mouth, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. Additional drugs are available to prevent the nausea and vomiting or treat it if it arises. While your pet is taking melphalan, your vet will need to do regular blood tests to monitor blood cell levels. Melphalan reduces the normal production of blood cells by the bone marrow, leaving your pet more susceptible to other infections. Melphalan may also cause lung problems that might cause breathlessness during exercise or make your pet breathe more rapidly or deeply. If your pet shows any unusual symptoms whilst taking this medication, please contact your vet.

### **What should I do if my pet is unwell while taking melphalan?**

If your pet is unwell while receiving medication, you should not give any further doses 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 tablets, the person should be taken to the local hospital **immediately**. Take this leaflet and any remaining tablets plus their container (even if it is empty) with you.

### **Whom do I contact if I want to know more?**

If you have any questions about this drug or concerns about your pet's health, contact your own vet. They will know your pet's medical history and will know about melphalan.