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Ursodiol

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By Rania Gollakner, BS, DVM, MPH

What is ursodiol?

Ursodiol (brand names: Actigall®, Urso®, Ursofalk®) is a bile acid used to treat the symptoms of gallbladder or bile related liver diseases such as gallbladder mucocele, cholestasis, and chronic liver inflammation.

Its use in cats, dogs, horses, and birds to treat liver and gallbladder conditions is ‘**off label**’ or ‘**extra label**’. Many drugs are commonly prescribed for off label use in veterinary medicine. In these instances, follow your veterinarian’s directions and cautions very carefully as their direction may be significantly different from those on the label.



How is ursodiol given?

Ursodiol is given by mouth in the form of a capsule, tablet, or liquid suspension and should be given with food. Measure liquid forms carefully. Do not give to rabbits, guinea pigs, or rodents. Do not give this medication with antacids that contain aluminum.

This medication should take effect within 1 to 2 days; however, effects may not be visibly obvious and therefore laboratory tests may need to be done to evaluate this medication’s effectiveness.

What if I miss giving my pet the medication?

If you miss a dose, skip the dose you missed and give it at the next scheduled time, and return to the regular dosing schedule. Never give your pet two doses at once or give extra doses.

Are there any potential side effects?

Side effects are uncommon but may include diarrhea or mild discomfort. Serious side effects include vomiting, lack of appetite, tiredness, or yellowing of the skin, eyes, or gums.

This short-acting medication should stop working within 24 hours, although effects can be longer in pets with liver or kidney disease.

Are there any risk factors for this medication?

Ursodiol should not be used in pets that are allergic to it or other bile acid products. It should not be used in rabbits or other hindgut fermenters. Ursodiol should be used cautiously in pets that may have complications related to gallstones such as biliary obstruction, cholecystitis, or pancreatitis. Because safety has not been clearly established, ursodiol should be used cautiously in pregnant and lactating pets.

Are there any drug interactions I should be aware of?

The following medications should be used with caution when given with ursodiol: aluminum-containing antacids, cholestyramine resin, or taurine.

Be sure to tell your veterinarian about any medications (**including vitamins, supplements, or herbal therapies**) that your pet is taking.

This medication may also interact with serum bile acid tests and may cause falsely elevated values.

Is there any monitoring that needs to be done with this medication?

Your veterinarian will monitor your pet’s liver function by performing a liver panel prior to starting this medication and then routinely at one month, three months, and then every six months thereafter. Your veterinarian may monitor your pet to be sure that the medication is working by evaluating liver values and performing a liver and gallbladder ultrasound.

How do I store ursodiol?

Store this medication at room temperature between 68°F and 77°F (20°C and 25°C) and protected from moisture and light.

What should I do in case of emergency?

If you suspect an overdose or an adverse reaction to the medication, call your veterinary office immediately. If they are not available, follow their directions in contacting an emergency facility.

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