



MELATONIN

Mechanism of action:

Melatonin is a naturally occurring hormone produced in the pineal gland of the brain. The secretion of melatonin increases in darkness and decreases during exposure to light, thereby regulating the circadian rhythms of several biological functions, including the sleep-wake cycle. In particular, melatonin regulates the sleep-wake cycle by causing drowsiness and lowering the body temperature. Melatonin is also implicated in the regulation of mood, learning and memory, immune activity, dreaming, fertility and reproduction. Melatonin is also an effective antioxidant. Most of the actions of melatonin are mediated through the binding and activation of melatonin receptors.

Common usage:

Melatonin has been used extensively in human medicine to treat sleep disorders as well as other conditions. In dogs it has been used successfully to treat sleep-wake cycle disturbances, anxiety, phobias and even alopecia. Its use is still considered experimental in dogs as limited amounts of specific clinical research has been conducted. However, it is considered very safe. Its efficacy seems to vary greatly between individuals and it may appear to work miraculously or do very little or nothing at all.

Melatonin may be used on its own in some mild cases or prescribed in combination with other medications as part of a multi-modal therapeutic approach. Melatonin can be used in combination with common behaviour medications such as SSRIs, TCAs, Trazodone, Clonidine, Benzodiazepines and Gabapentin. We may prescribe Melatonin to be given as a second or even third line medication in addition to other necessary medications.

Dose rate:

Melatonin is prescribed at a dose of 1mg to 6mg (depending on the size of the dog and the severity of the condition). This is 1mg-6mg per animal (not per kg of bodyweight).

Expected desired effect:

Melatonin can facilitate sleep in patients who routinely suffer from sleep disturbances due to primary sleep problems or sleep issues secondary to pain, anxiety or hyperarousal disorders. We would hope that while receiving this medication, your dog is more relaxed and calm and can achieve normal quantity and quality of sleep.

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Possible side effects:

Adverse effects are rare. This medication is very safe and well tolerated and has minimal side effects in most people and animals. Some reported side effects are: drowsiness, gastrointestinal upset, confusion, itchiness, headache.

Contraindications:

No specific contraindications are known in dogs. There are no barriers to treatment with Melatonin.

“Off-label” implications:

Melatonin is prescribed “off-label” to dogs. This means it is not actually officially licensed for use in canines. It is not a registered veterinary product.

It is known anecdotally to be well tolerated, safe and effective however, there are minimal scientific studies documenting its clinical use at this point in time.

How to obtain it:

Melatonin is available in the form of 1mg, 2mg, 3mg and 10mg oral capsules and tablets. It can be obtained from a human pharmacy via a veterinary script or often over the counter. It can also be purchased easily online.

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