

PETSIT PRO

Online Training Subscription for Pet-Care Professionals

June 2022 Mini Course: ADMINISTERING MEDICATIONS TO PETS USING FEAR FREE STRATEGIES (presented by Alyssa N. Cary, LVT)

TRANSCRIPT

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Section 1: INTRO TO FEAR FREE

SLIDE Hello! My name is Alyssa Cary, I am a licensed veterinary technician and Elite Fear Free Certified Professional, and I will be taking you through this course on Administering Medications to Pets Using Fear Free Strategies. This course is divided into four sections.

SLIDE First we will briefly talk about Fear Free, and then we will dive into the techniques for medicating dogs and cats. Last, we will cover a few of the more common medications you may come across and some general tips for successfully medicating pets.

SLIDE Section 1: Introduction to Fear Free. If you are not yet familiar with Fear Free, here's the basic information you should know as we move through this course.

SLIDE Fear Free is an education company providing online and in-person CE courses for veterinary professionals, pet professionals, and pet owners to alleviate and reduce fear, anxiety, and stress in pets and provide enrichment. You may have heard or seen the tagline "taking the 'pet' out of 'petrified.'"

SLIDE Fear Free's company mission is to alleviate fear, anxiety, and stress in pets and to educate and inspire the people that care for them. While this started with a certification program only for veterinary professionals and focused on small animals, over the last several years the company has diligently worked to include other pet professionals - such as groomers, trainers, and now pet sitters and dog walkers - and additional species.

SLIDE Fear, anxiety, and stress is referred to throughout the Fear Free program and by Fear Free professionals as FAS. FAS occurs along a continuum and is fluid. A pet's FAS level can change rapidly when triggers are added or removed.

Being able to accurately assess a pet's FAS level is an essential skill for a Fear Free Certified Professional and requires both practice and a fluent understanding of dog and cat body language. It is important to remember to assess the WHOLE body, not just a single body part or body language cue, when interpreting the message the pet is trying to send.

SLIDE Two helpful videos to help you learn more about canine and feline body language are available through the Fear Free Happy Homes website, and will be available in the additional resources provided with this course.

SLIDE There are three major cornerstones of Fear Free: Considerate Approach, Gentle Control, and Communication. For our purposes in this course, we will focus on Considerate Approach and Gentle Control, and we'll sprinkle in some Touch Gradient as a method of communication between us and the pet.

SLIDE Considerate approach is the interaction between pet and pet professional, including sensory inputs from the environment. What that means is when we approach an animal, we have to think about a lot of things that can impact how the animal responds. How is my body moving? Am I doing anything to come across as unsafe or threatening? What about the environment? Are we in a neutral space, where there is access to escape if the animal is frightened? Are there other factors such as noises or smells which may be affecting the animal's perception of me? Always have a plan when approaching an animal, and be sure to consider all five senses.

SLIDE Gentle control is the way we position an animal for services - in this course, we're just talking about positioning for medicating, and your control technique will primarily be keeping the patient in a place that is open enough for them to feel safe, but closed off to prevent escape or interaction with other pets in the home.

SLIDE Touch Gradient simply means we want to keep consistent, constant touch on our pet and gradually increase the level of pressure as we go. It's basically a warning to the pet about what's coming next, so that we can assess their level of comfort with varying degrees of touch. We'll talk through a few strategies for different medications and species in the next two sections.

Section 2: MEDICATING DOGS

SLIDE The absolute most important thing to remember when medicating pets is the rule of the 5 R's.

SLIDE The five R's are: right PATIENT, right MEDICATION, right DOSE, right ROUTE, and right TIME. Let's clarify what exactly each of these means.

Right PATIENT: Always be sure you are giving the medication to the correct pet.

Right MEDICATION: Always be sure you are giving the correct medication to the pet. This becomes more of a challenge when owners remove medications from their original packaging and place them into pill organizers or other secondary packaging. Encourage owners to leave medications in their original containers to reduce the risk of error.

Right DOSE: Always verify doses on prescription labels match what the pet owner is actually giving. Sometimes there are ranges in doses or doses may change based on therapeutic levels assessed in routine bloodwork. Some labels may instruct owners to "use as directed" without any clear definition of a dose. And although this is not ideal, the reality is that some owners go against veterinary advice and adjust dosing themselves.

Right ROUTE: It's usually pretty obvious that a pill or capsule is going to be given by mouth, but ointments and other kinds of medications can have specific locations where they should be administered - such as on the inner ear pinna, in the ear canal, or on a skin lesion or wound. Always verify where or how a medication is to be administered.

Right TIME: Medications may be given once, twice, three or even four times daily; at specific times such as before a stressful event; or have a variable time of administration based on need, such as for pain control. Always confirm when the last dose was given and how frequently you are to give the medication.

Ok. Now that you've got the 5 R's down, let's move on to how we're going to get these medications administered in the most Fear Free way possible!

SLIDE Oral medications for dogs should theoretically be easy to administer: Just pop that pill into a piece of cheese and dogs gobble it right up! Right? Well... not always. Some dogs are painfully picky or wise to the tricks, so sometimes we have to get creative. Ideally we want to avoid manually pilling our pets, but it's not always avoidable. Before we go for manual pilling, though, let's exhaust our options for offering oral medications in tasty things. Be sure to get approval from your client to try different high value food options - increasingly we are seeing pets with specific dietary restrictions and sensitivities to certain things, and we do not want to be causing any GI distress or adverse reactions in our attempts to medicate a pet! You'll also need to be careful to avoid toxic substances, like peanut butter with xylitol or packaged food containing onion or garlic for flavor. Some options for high value foods for disguising medications include peanut butter, a cheese variety (such as cream cheese, cottage cheese, squeeze cheese or my personal favorite,

the nicely moldable Kraft singles), deli meat, hot dogs, canned tuna, or simply canned pet food and baby food. Test the food by itself before disguising any medication in it, and be generous with it! A little bit of food barely covering the medication is less likely to be successful. Additionally, crushing pills or opening capsules to mix powder into food is a good option for some dogs and some medications. Check with a veterinarian before doing this; some pills and powders can be bitter, and crushing or opening them will make pilling harder! One last bit of advice: Some dogs get smart to our tricks, and learn to associate particular high value food items with the medication hiding within, and then refuse something they used to enjoy. Change it up! Offer a variety to keep it new, give the high value food sans medication, and offer multiple treats back to back with and without medication. Sometimes pattern and routine can work to our detriment, so be like a slot machine and keep them guessing so they'll continue to come back for more!

SLIDE Getting a pet medicated just by eating something delicious with a pill hidden in it is the ultimate considerate approach. But, if all of your attempts at disguising the medication in something yummy fail, OR if you have an oral liquid medication to administer, you'll have to practice a different kind of considerate approach and gentle control as you manually pill the pet or administer medication with an oral dosing syringe. Our goal to reduce stress with manual medication administration will be to accomplish it as quickly and smoothly as possible. Be careful not to administer oral liquids too quickly, though - you don't want to cause aspiration pneumonia by accidentally having the pet inhale it! Give a little bit at a time and allow the pet to swallow, especially for larger volumes. If you are struggling, stop after 3 attempts to give the pet a break, do something the pet enjoys like a short play session or a walk, and then re-attempt. It may be helpful (and safer!) to have a pill popper tool in order to get the pill on the back of the tongue, but you can use your finger, too. Syringes should be placed in the corner of the mouth or cheek.

SLIDE Topical or transdermal medications will often require the art of distraction and touch gradient. This is where you'll use your high value food to keep the pet busy while you apply the medication, and for some time after so that the pet doesn't lick the medication (if it's in a lickable location). Going for a walk or engaging in a training or play session are all great ways to distract the pet after application as well. Be aware that the area where you are applying the medication may be painful or it could have become sensitized after multiple applications. Test the pet's receptiveness to touch by starting to pet the dog in a safe location such as the chin, chest, or neck, and then gradually move your hands to the area to be medicated. If you notice the dog stops eating or moves away from you, those are good indicators that they are not fond of this medication application. Continue to tune into the body language and proceed only if safe. You may need to hold onto the dog's collar or leash to keep him from moving away as you apply the medication. Great options for hands-free food distraction include slow feeders, snuffle mats, lick mats, or other similar tools available for purchase.

SLIDE Eye medications are often the medications that will require the most frequent administration, and the most difficult. For your considerate approach, try having the dog sit and approach the dog from behind. Tilt the head back by offering a high value treat as a distraction and use your other hand to quickly apply the ointment or drops to the eye(s). Another option for drops is to catch them while they're asleep and drip the medication into the medial canthus, or the inner corner, of the eye. When they blink, it will distribute the medication across the eye.

SLIDE Injectable medications are not commonly prescribed for pets, with one exception: Insulin. Diabetic pets notoriously become averse to these twice daily injections, even though the needle is super tiny, and this is an essential medication that must be given in a certain window of time. Touch gradient certainly comes into play with this medication and involves an extra layer beyond touch with your hands. You'll need to use the pattern of "pet, pinch, poke." While the pet is distracted with food, pet around the chin, chest, neck, and then shoulder blade area where the injection is to be given; then, test the pet's reaction to pinching a skin tent over that area; and finally, poke the area where you will be giving the injection with a capped syringe. If the pet stops eating or tries to move away, employ gentle control methods such as a leash or collar hold. If the pet shows higher levels of reactivity like growling, snarling, or trying to bite, you may need to consult with the client and come up with a plan to involve the pet's veterinary team. It is unlikely you will have the time to use desensitization and counterconditioning techniques to help the pet become more comfortable with these injections, but the owner should be encouraged to do so as this is a lifelong medication.

Section 3: MEDICATING CATS

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SLIDE Some of this content may feel a bit redundant, as many techniques are similar; however, there are some important differences to note between species. To start, we'll recall that the absolute most important thing to remember when medicating pets is the rule of the 5 R's. The five R's are: right PATIENT, right MEDICATION, right DOSE, right ROUTE, and right TIME.

SLIDE In most cases, medicating cats is trickier than medicating dogs. Many cats will not gobble up a pill or capsule hidden in food, but it is always worth a try! One important thing to note for using food with cats: Cats are very easily turned off of food if they find an unpleasant taste or odor associated with it, so it is best to avoid adding medication to a cat's regular food and use something novel instead. Great options for high value treats for cats include a variety of cheese options (cream, squeeze, Kraft), pill pockets or pill wrap products specifically designed for hiding medication, Churu or other squeezable cat treats, canned cat food, deli meat, canned tuna or salmon, and baby food. Again, avoid anything with toxic substances like xylitol, garlic, and onion. Always get permission from owners before offering a high value food the pet has not had before.

Offer the food alone first to test whether or not the cat likes it, be generous with how much food you use with the medication, and be prepared to go through some trial and error. And don't forget to change it up! Offer a variety to keep it new, give the high value food sans medication, and offer multiple treats back to back with and without medication.

SLIDE Getting a pet medicated just by eating something delicious with a pill hidden in it is the ultimate considerate approach. But, if all of your attempts at disguising the medication in something yummy fail, OR if you have an oral liquid medication to administer, you'll have to practice a different kind of considerate approach and gentle control as you manually pill the pet or administer medication with an oral dosing syringe. Our goal to reduce stress with manual medication administration will be to accomplish it as quickly and smoothly as possible. Be careful not to administer oral liquids too quickly, though - you don't want to cause aspiration pneumonia by accidentally having the pet inhale it! Give a little bit at a time and allow the pet to swallow, especially for larger volumes. If you are struggling, stop after 2 attempts to give the pet a break, do something the pet enjoys like a short play session or relaxing and petting, and then re-attempt. It may be helpful (and safer!) to have a pill popper tool in order to get the pill on the back of the tongue, but you can use your finger, too. Syringes should be placed in the corner of the mouth or cheek.

SLIDE Topical or transdermal medication administration for cats looks about the same for cats as it does for dogs. Use your high value food on a lick mat or in a bowl to keep the cat distracted, and your touch gradient to check for sensitivity to touch in the area the medication is to be applied. Test the cat's receptiveness to touch by starting to pet the cat in a safe location such as the chin, cheeks, or neck, and then gradually move your hands to the area to be medicated. If you notice the cat stops eating or moves away from you, those are good indicators that they are not fond of this medication application. Continue to tune into the body language and proceed only if safe. You will need to keep the cat from licking the area for at least 15 minutes after application, so keep the cat busy playing or being pet - whichever that cat most enjoys - or apply a recovery or cone collar temporarily. If you can, apply the medication just before a meal so that the cat is hungry and may be distracted for a portion of the time post-medication simply by eating a meal.

SLIDE Eye medications are often the medications that will require the most frequent administration, and the most difficult. For your considerate approach, try having the cat sit on your lap facing away from you. Quick note: You can use this position for administering your oral medications manually and also for administering inhaler puffs with an Aerokat for asthmatic kitties, too. Tilt the head back by offering a high value treat as a distraction and use your other hand to quickly apply the ointment or drops to the eye(s). Another option for drops is to catch them while they're asleep and drip the medication into the medial canthus, or the inner corner, of the eye. Blinking will distribute the medication across the eye.

SLIDE Injectable medications for cats, similar to dogs, are not commonly prescribed, but you will see them prescribed Insulin. Diabetic pets notoriously become averse to these twice daily injections, even though the needle is super tiny, and this is an essential medication that must be given in a certain window of time. No pressure, right? Touch gradient certainly comes into play with this medication and involves an extra layer beyond touch with your hands. You'll need to use the pattern of "pet, pinch, poke." While the pet is distracted with food, pet around the chin, chest, neck, and then shoulder blade area where the injection is to be given; then, test the pet's reaction to pinching a skin tent over that area; and finally, poke the area where you will be giving the injection with a capped syringe. If the cat is non-reactive you can proceed with the injection in the same manner, just with the needle uncapped, of course. If the pet shows higher levels of reactivity like growling, hissing, swatting or trying to bite, you may need to consult with the client and come up with a plan to involve the pet's veterinary team. It is unlikely you will have the time to use desensitization and counterconditioning techniques to help the pet become more comfortable with these injections, but the owner should be encouraged to do so as this is a lifelong medication.

Section 4: GENERAL TIPS

SLIDE Here are some of my general tips and tricks for you to close out this course on Fear Free strategies for medicating pets.

SLIDE Chances are, the pets in your care have been routinely receiving the medication you're tasked with administering. Ask the client how they've been successful in medicating their pet, AND how they've been unsuccessful. You are likely to be successful in the same way the pet parent has been, so you may not even need to try any of these methods. Always good to have them in your toolbelt, though.

When discussing medications to be administered with a client, always verify the dose and timing of the medication. Be sure the client communicates when the last dose of a medication was given before you take over care so that the pet is not under or over-medicated.

SLIDE In addition to being super familiar with the 5 R's, there are several other important things to remember for the safety of yourself and the pet you're medicating. Always wear gloves when administering topical medications. They're absorbed through the skin, so if you put it on your finger, you're going to absorb some of that medication, too. Common transdermal medications include fluoxetine, or generic Prozac, for anxiety; Mirataz, which is the brand name for mirtazapine, for appetite stimulation; and methimazole for hyperthyroidism. Most transdermal medications are applied to the pinna, or inner ear tip, of cats. It is less common to use transdermal medications in dogs, but you may still find yourself applying some sort of

antimicrobial or antifungal cream or mousse to the skin such as in the groin area or paws, or an ear medication into the ear canal for ear infections.

You should wear gloves when handling some oral medications too, such as chemotherapeutic drugs; metronidazole, which is a commonly prescribed antibiotic for diarrhea; and chlorpheniramine. Be sure to read prescription labels for any warnings. Wash your hands after administering ANY medication. There are lots of possible oral medications and supplements pets can take, so be proactive in learning what the purpose of each medication is that you'll be administering and what the potential risks to your health may be.

SLIDE Eye medications are a pain, even for the most skilled hands. Be very careful when applying eye medications to avoid touching the eye with the dropper or applicator. You could contaminate the medication or scratch the eye and cause a corneal ulcer. Most commonly you may find yourself applying medications to treat KCS or simply Dry Eye. Medications for this include tacrolimus and cyclosporine, and often include a second component of artificial tears. When administering more than one eye medication, we apply drops before ointments, and wait 5 minutes between medications to allow them time to absorb.

Some formulations of eye drops and compounded oral liquid medications may be oil-based and use nut-based oils. (Most frequently I've seen almond and coconut.) Although it's unlikely to cause an allergic reaction due to the refinement process used in making the oils, if you have a severe nut allergy, it never hurts to be extra cautious with these medications. The prescription label will indicate what carrier oil is used, if any. These medications are few and far between, so encountering this will likely be a rare occurrence for you.

SLIDE Any injectable medication besides insulin that may need to be given should always be given with a fresh needle, not the needle that the medication was drawn up with. Needles dull very quickly especially after piercing the rubber stopper of a vial, and dull needles cause more pain and discomfort than sharp needles. Insulin syringes do not allow for needles to be changed, but they are so small most pets don't notice them anyway. Some subcutaneous injections besides insulin may include vitamin B12 or Adequan, which is for joint support.

SLIDE Some medications and supplements are less essential than others. If you are having difficulty medicating a pet, contact the owner or the pet's veterinary team for help. You may be able to forego some medications and supplements if the pet's FAS is extremely elevated and/or your safety is threatened.

Pets can be trained to receive medications cooperatively; while you may not be able to make much progress with this over short stints, you can share the resources with your clients and encourage them to work on it.

Many pet parents give medications successfully to their pets, and this is partly attributed to the human-animal bond they share. Create and foster a bond between yourself and the pets under your care; the more they trust you, the easier it will be to medicate them. The emotional connection is often the strongest tool in your toolbox besides high value food items. This bond can be damaged by repeated struggles with medication administration, and stress can exacerbate many medical conditions, which is why using Fear Free techniques is so important! Negative experiences for the pet and the pet parent lead to distrust, fear, resentment, which can prevent pets from receiving treatment they need for a variety of medical conditions.

SLIDE In conclusion, always use your considerate approach, gentle control, and touch gradient when working with a pet to administer medications. Change up your approach if what you try first is not successful. Refer to the provided additional resources for extra help. I promise you, Fear Free strategies will make medicating pets far more enjoyable for everyone involved! Thank you for watching this course on using Fear Free strategies to medicate pets. I hope you enjoyed it and picked up a few tricks to try out!