ACETAMINOPHEN (TYLENOL®)

Source

There are many over-the-counter cold and flu remedies that contain Tylenol® in varying concentrations.

Symptoms

Signs of toxicity may be present as soon as one hour after ingestion, but usually occur within 6-24 hours. Symptoms occur secondary to the effect of the drug on blood cells and liver cells.

- Progressive depression
- Weakness and/or incoordination
- Rapid or labored breathing
- Elevated heart rate
- Chocolate-brown colored gums
- Dark colored urine
- Vomiting
- Swelling of the neck, face and limbs (typically in cats)
- Jaundice
- Abdominal discomfort (colic)
- Low body temperature

Toxicity

Toxicity is caused by an active metabolite of acetaminophen that causes severe damage to the liver and red blood cells. Acetaminophen toxicity is seen mostly in cats because they are extremely sensitive to it.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is based on clinical signs and blood work. Although special tests are available to detect the presence of acetaminophen and its metabolites in the blood, these tests are not frequently used in veterinary medicine due to the expense and length of time it takes to get the results.

Treatment

Treatment initially consists of eliminating the acetaminophen from the body. This is partially accomplished by making the animal vomit (if the ingestion was within 2 hours) to help remove any remaining drug from the stomach. Your veterinarian may then give your pet an activated charcoal suspension that helps prevent further absorption of any acetaminophen that is still in the intestinal tract. A specific antidote, N-acetylcysteine (NAC, Mucomyst®), is available for acetaminophen toxicity. It is expensive, but will greatly improve survival if administered early enough. Hospitalization for supportive care

and monitoring is usually necessary.

Prognosis

With early and aggressive treatment, the prognosis in cases of acetaminophen ingestion in dogs is favorable. Cats are exquisitely sensitive to acetaminophen and have a poor prognosis for surviving ingestion of even small doses of this drug if not treated early and aggressively.