

Spironolactone

Spironolactone is a *diuretic* medication. That is, it results in an increased amount of urination and fluid loss from the body. Specifically, it works by blocking a hormone in the body called “aldosterone,” which normally causes sodium and water to be retained. By blocking aldosterone, sodium and water that would otherwise be saved in the body are lost as urine. This is useful in conditions that include excessive fluid retention.

As is true for other diuretic agents, the most common use of spironolactone is for the treatment of congestive heart failure and the fluid overload that defines this condition. Typically it is added to therapy for heart failure as a second diuretic medication, with the more potent agent, furosemide (often called Lasix), having previously been prescribed. Although spironolactone is somewhat weaker than furosemide, it serves as an effective addition to treatment for heart failure which has become difficult to control. Furthermore, it is less prone to electrolyte disturbances (particularly decreased potassium levels) commonly caused by furosemide. Other beneficial effects, such as protection against scar tissue formation in the heart, have proven to be important in human heart failure patients, although this is less clear in veterinary medicine. In rare instances, spironolactone is used to treat systemic arterial hypertension (high blood pressure).

Before beginning treatment with spironolactone, blood work should be performed to assess hydration status, kidney function, and electrolyte concentrations. This should be repeated within the next 5-7 days to monitor for any changes in these values. Chest x-rays may also be recommended at that time in order to assess response to the added therapy for congestive heart failure.

Addition of spironolactone will cause increased thirst due to the intended increase in urination. All diuretic medications have the potential to cause dehydration due to excessive fluid loss. Please remember that your pet should **always** have unlimited access to water in order to minimize the risk of dehydration. Imbalances in electrolytes can also occur. Symptoms of dehydration and electrolyte abnormalities include lethargy, weakness, and loss of appetite. Signs of worsening heart failure include return or worsening of coughing (in dogs), intolerance to exercise, rapid or labored breathing, or abdominal distension. If any of these symptoms are noted, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact either your veterinarian or Veterinary Specialty Services immediately to discuss an appropriate plan.