

# 10 OTC Human Drugs that You Can Give Your Pet

By Dr. Patty Khuly | [vetstreet.com](http://vetstreet.com)



Pepcid AC

In case you don't know, OTC stands for "over the counter," meaning that no prescription is needed. Armed with your vet's say-so, all you have to do is pluck the drug off the store shelf and follow your vet's oral or written instructions.

Now wasn't that tons easier (and probably much cheaper) than buying things via the pharmacy?

Luckily, there are lots of drugs that don't have to abide by the stringent rules of the written prescription - most of which you've probably heard of. Nonetheless, I feel the need to describe them because maybe, just maybe, there's something I can add to your basic understanding of these medications, their indications and contraindications.

**See Also: [5 Dangerous Over-the-Counter Products for Pets](#)**

Here are my top 10 picks, which are peppered liberally with disclaimers about always asking your vet first before using *any* drug . Remember: O-T-C doesn't necessarily mean S-A-F-E!

## 1. Pepcid AC (famotidine)

## 2. Tagamet HB (cimetidine)

These stomach drugs, which hinder the body's production of GI acids, are great for pets when gastric juices flow into overdrive. They're mostly given to dogs for simple gastritis (stomach inflammation), which can result from a number of tummy insults - self-inflicted through "dietary indiscretion" or otherwise.

Dosage depends on the pet's size, other drugs administered and your pet's general condition. Always check with your vet first to get the go-ahead and the right dosage.

### **3. Aspirin**

Although most vets no longer recommend aspirin for pain - why use a less potent, more stomach-harming drug when safer, more effective ones are available? - some of us still rely on it when a canine client is far away and nothing else is available.

As a rule, I never recommend using aspirin more than two days in a row and never in combination with other NSAIDs, such as Rimadyl, Metacam and Derramax. Drug interactions with aspirin are not uncommon, so don't automatically assume it's safe to give it to your pet.

Some cats may also do well with small doses of aspirin, but this is much more controversial -- too much so for the purposes of this discussion. So always check with your veterinarian before even considering this OTC approach with your cat.

### **4. Artificial tears and other ophthalmic lubricants**

Genteal and Soothe XP are my favorites for getting the red out. I love these preparations for minor eye irritations -- they're the ultimate do-no-harm optical treatment.

Most of the time, very mild conjunctivitis (slight weepiness or redness around the eyes) will clear up within a few days of simple soothing with artificial tears. But if your pet has white, yellow or greenish discharge; extreme redness or swelling; or if the eye obviously hurts (your pet will wink or close the eye), skip this step and immediately head to the vet! Even a day is too long with a painful eye.

**See Also: [6 Dangerous Foods to NEVER Give Your Pet](#)**

### **5. Benadryl (diphenhydramine)**

### **6. Zyrtec (cetirizine)**

### **7. Claritin (loratadine)**

These are great, easy-going drugs used for common cases of the itches or the first sign of hives. I use them liberally in my practice, but they don't lack side effects. Other OTC antihistamines may also be effective for allergic reactions in pets, but Benadryl, Zyrtec and Claritin are most commonly recommended.

Be warned: Some pets will feel the sedating effects more than others, especially those who are also taking mood-altering drugs, certain pain relievers and seizure medications. You should also note that the dosage can be significantly different for pets than for humans, so call your vet first and ask if it's OK.

## **8. Neosporin and antibiotic gels**

Minor cuts and abrasions love this gel. I tend to recommend them only for the slightest of scrapes, and they should be applied onto clean skin in a very light coat for only a day or two - that's all it should take.

Some issues to be aware of with these ointments: People tend to buy fancy ones with tetracaine, hydrocortisone and other ingredients that can hinder healing for some wounds. And pets like to lick wounds, especially when their attention is drawn to them via smelly gels. In these cases, they're contraindicated -- the risk is greater than the reward.

## **9. Corticosteroid sprays, gels and creams**

Standard OTC corticosteroid sprays and creams, such as hydrocortisone, can be life-savers in a pinch when itchy red patches and hot spots appear. But you should know that the sprays can be stingy (they typically contain alcohol). The gels and creams are great - unless, of course, they attract your pet to lick the itchy spot.

## **10. Antifungal sprays, gels and creams**

An OTC product containing miconazole (or one of several other common antifungal drugs) will sometimes resolve uncomplicated fungal infections. Unfortunately, most fungal infections in pets aren't uncomplicated. Still, I've often sent clients to the drug-store for an OTC antifungal to keep a pet comfortable until they can come in for an office visit.

These are my top OTC human meds for pets, but always, always, always check with your own vet before giving your pets any medications.

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