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Cephalexin.

BRAND NAME: KEFLEX

AVAILABLE IN

250 mg & 500 mg

CAPSULES

AND AS

ORAL SUSPENSION

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Thanks to work by Alexander Fleming (1881-1955), Howard Florey (1898-1968) and Ernst Chain (1906-1979), penicillin was first produced on a large scale for human use in 1943.

At that time, the development of a pill that could reliably kill bacteria was a remarkable and many lives were saved during World War II because this medication was available.

But quickly, it became obvious that this new "wonder drug" could bear improvement.

For example:

Penicillin is not well absorbed from the intestinal tract meaning that at least 70% of an oral dose is wasted.

Penicillin is also a short-acting medication, with half of the amount circulating being removed from the body every half hour.

Not all bacteria have the type of cell wall which is susceptible to destruction by penicillin.

(Bacteria are classified as Gram negative or Gram positive, depending on the cell wall characteristics.

Penicillin is able to punch holes through the Gram positive cell wall but is not very effective against the Gram negative cell wall.)

Staphylococci (an important group of bacteria) have developed an enzyme to break the penicillin molecule apart.

The cephalosporin class was developed to improve upon the accomplishments of the penicillin class.

Like penicillin, the cephalosporins are biological in origin stemming from a substance called "cephalosporin C" which is produced by the bacterium *Cephalosporium acremonium*.

Cephalosporin antibiotics are classified into three groups.

The first group developed (the so-called "**First Generation Cephalosporins**") is effective against most Gram positive infections, some Gram negative infections and is able to withstand the anti-penicillin enzymes produced by *Staphylococci*.

Most anaerobic infections are also sensitive to the first generation cephalosporins. **Cephalexin is a first generation Cephalosporin.**

The "Second Generation Cephalosporins" have an increased spectrum against Gram negative bacteria and anaerobic infections while the "Third Generation Cephalosporins" are effective against still more Gram negative bacteria.

Medications from these latter classes are generally not available for oral administration though [cefpodoxime](#), a now fairly common veterinary drug, is one of the few third generation's cephalosporins that is available for oral use.

HOW THIS MEDICINE IS USED.

Cephalexin is a good broad spectrum antibiotic which means it is useful in most common and uncomplicated infections.

It is especially useful against Staphylococcal infections (most skin infections) and is commonly used for long (6-8 week) courses against deep skin infections ("pyodermas").

SIDE EFFECTS.

Nausea may be seen in some individuals receiving cephalexin.

In general, this problem is solved by giving the medication with food.

Occasionally cats will develop a fever in response to cephalexin.

If this occurs, a different antibiotic should be selected.

The veterinarian should be informed.

Occasionally dogs will develop hyperexcitability and drooling in response to taking cephalexin.

If this occurs, another antibiotic should be selected. The veterinarian should be informed.

INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER DRUGS.

In treating more serious infections, cephalosporins are often used in combination with other antibiotics to cover a broader group of bacteria when a specific agent of infection is not known.

CONCERNS AND CAUTIONS.

This medication is commonly used for several months without monitoring tests of any kind. It is felt to be safe for long term use. The oral suspension is only good for a two week period. Refrigeration is recommended.

Cephalexin does not cross into milk well and thus is probably not a concern in lactating females.

It does, however, cross the placenta and is best not used in pregnancy if it can be avoided.

Should nausea result from administration, simply give the medication with food.