



Medicating Dogs: Homemade Pill Pockets and Other Tricks

Melissa Shapiro, DVM

If you live with a dog, it is likely that at some point, you will be faced with the dreaded task of having to administer medication. Even some of the most cooperative dogs object to having pills shoved down their throat. So, we carefully hide their pills in peanut butter, and they figure out how to meticulously clean all the peanut butter off the pill which they then leave on the carpet for us to step on or even worse, they hide it under the couch so we don't know they actually didn't take the medication at all. Many dogs initially will take pills wrapped in the infamous "American Cheese" but after a while, they run for the hills when they hear the crinkle of the package.

Specialty compounding pharmacies are popping up to address the need for tasty ways to get meds into dogs. They offer flavored liquids and tablets, tiny capsules, transdermal creams, and even injectable meds. Some of these items can be costly so many pet parents look for other ways to medicate their pets. Commercially sold pill pockets are popular but I would rather feed something a little more natural and healthy when I deliver meds to my own dogs, especially when they are taking daily medications for long periods of time.

Some dogs are extremely easy to "pill." They might even eat the most bitter tasting tablets. But this is a rare aberration. Some dogs are highly food motivated and will take pills hidden in just about anything. Piglet, the deaf blind pink puppy will snarf down his daily medication when it is hidden in a piece of scrambled egg, butter, or peanut butter.

There are also countless homegrown creative ways to get medications where they need to go. Homemade pill pockets are easy to create. Varying the specific food item, timing of the medication if possible, and alternating the "laced" foods with plain food will keep your dog off guard.

There's a wide variety of foods that can become your next pill pocket. Use foods your dog really loves. Monopolize on textures of foods and chill foods for better pill holding properties. Most important, act like he is getting the best treat in the world. Have him sit, do tricks, and then hand off the medication laden treat to your unsuspecting very happy pup.

Instead of scrambling an egg, make an egg patty. Then cut the patty into squares of varying sizes so they are thick enough to slide a pill or capsule in between the two layers. Most dogs don't chew soft treats so the whole package is likely to slide down in one quick swallow.

Other foods that make great safe homemade pill pockets are warm or chilled peanut butter and jelly sandwich squares, chilled peanut butter balls, butter balls, cream cheese balls, cut pieces of hot dog, soft cooked pasta, pieces of chicken and beef, melted cheese on toast, and just about anything else your dog likes. If necessary, double layer the food by slathering peanut butter on the food containing the pill. Change up the food item wrapper regularly to keep dogs from habituating and becoming suspicious.

When administering bitter tasting pills, it is important to wash hands once the pill is buried well inside the food item to avoid leaving any trace of the pill on the outside of the food pocket. Be sure to use big enough chunks of food to bury pills for very fussy dogs.

Liquid meds, powders, and tablets that are easily crushed can be hidden in meat flavored baby food, yogurt, ice cream, mashed tuna or salmon with the "juice", chicken and beef broth, and gravies. These concoctions will commonly be attractive enough for dogs to happily lap up their meds. A sprinkle of parmesan cheese will often be enough to divert a dog's nose away from their worry about ingesting medication.

Some dogs are just impossible and will not take oral medications under any circumstances. Alternatives include transdermal creams which can be compounded by a specialty pharmacy. A dab of specially formulated cream containing a specified concentration of medication is applied to the inner ear flap, alternating ears with each dose. The medication is absorbed through the skin. Lick doses are also made by a specialty pharmacist. The medication is formulated into a very tasty ointment that can be applied to the skin on the inner thigh for the dog to lick off.

When all else fails, some medications are available in injectable form. Injections can be done at home or at the vet hospital depending on the specific meds and individual dogs.

Of course, checking in with your veterinarian is the best place to start when you have questions and concerns about medicating your dog.