

Antibiotic Use Talking Points for Vet Clinics

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND CLIENT SATISFACTION

Antibiotics are an important part of veterinary care. However, antibiotic use is a major driver of antibiotic resistance, and antibiotic-resistant infections are a growing problem in clinical veterinary medicine. By using clear language, watchful waiting, and positive recommendations for alleviation of clinical signs, veterinarians can effectively communicate with clients when antibiotics are not needed. Because they are not without risk, antibiotics should only be used when needed. Diagnostic testing, like culture and susceptibility, is an important part of veterinary practice. As a team, discuss these and other talking points that might work in your clinic.

Strategies and Examples for Counseling Clients

Communication Strategy	Examples
Explain why antibiotics are not needed	<p>“Your dog’s diarrhea is not caused by a bacterial infection, so antibiotics will not help in this case.”</p> <p>“I’m happy to tell you that you do not need an antibiotic! Your cat has an upper respiratory tract infection caused by a virus, and antibiotics won’t help.”</p> <p>“Cats do not usually get urinary tract infections. Straining to urinate can be caused by stress or by bladder stones, so antibiotics are not a best first choice.”</p> <p>Tip: Did you know? Clients are likely more willing to hear that antibiotics are not needed if the message is combined with information on how they can help their pet feel better. This shows that you have heard their concerns and want to help.</p>
Positive treatment recommendations	<p>“Medicated shampoo might resolve your dog’s skin issues and help him feel less itchy.”</p> <p>“You can make your cat feel better until this upper respiratory tract infection resolves by using appetite stimulants, warming food, and providing humidified air.”</p> <p>Tip: Did you know? Positive treatment recommendations should always be combined with explanations for why antibiotics are not needed.</p>
Contingency plan	<p>“If your pet does not seem better in three to four days, call me or schedule an appointment so we can reassess and consider other therapy.”</p> <p>“If your pet’s condition worsens or does not improve in 10 days, an antibiotic or other therapy might be needed. Call the clinic so that we can reassess.”</p>
Delayed antibiotic prescriptions	<p>“Your cat has an upper respiratory tract infection that will likely clear up on its own. We do not want to use antibiotics unless we need to. Watch him for changes, and fill this prescription in three days only if he isn’t improving or clinical signs worsen.”</p> <p>“Your cat has an uncomplicated urinary tract infection that can likely be treated with only three days of antibiotics. If after three days clinical signs continue, call me or schedule an appointment so we can see if additional days of therapy are needed.”</p> <p>Tip: Did you know? When using delayed prescriptions, write an expiration date on the prescriptions (i.e., five to ten days in the future) so it can be filled only during the watchful waiting period and not a few months later.</p>

This table was adapted from a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention editorial published in the August 1, 2016, issue of *American Family Physician*. *How to Prescribe Fewer Unnecessary Antibiotics: Talking Points That Work with Patients and Their Families* (<https://www.aafp.org/afp/2016/0801/p200.html>). Find additional resources at *Antimicrobial Resistance and Stewardship Initiative* (<https://arsi.umn.edu/as-resources>).

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