

PET HEALTH

## Caring for Your Pets

We asked two Westchester veterinarians—Jeremy Sabatini, DVM, of Pleasantville Animal Hospital and Stacey Joy Hershman, DVM, CVH, CVA, a holistic veterinarian, certified veterinary homeopath, and certified veterinary acupuncturist, of Natural Vet for Pets P.C. in Hastings-on-Hudson—to weigh in on three common areas of concern.

### Should dogs and cats be neutered or spayed?

**JS:** Yes. Not only is it better for your pet's overall health, but it helps control bad behaviors and keep shelter populations down.

**SJH:** All healthy, young dogs and cats should be spayed to prevent pyometra (uterine abscess) and mammary cancer, or neutered to prevent prostatitis and testicular cancer.



### Are vaccines essential?

**JS:** Vaccines are important, but not every pet needs all of the vaccines available. Rabies, distemper, and Lyme are recommended as part of the core vaccinations for pets in our area that are doing outdoor activities.

**SJH:** There is no scientific evidence requiring annual vaccines, and over-vaccination can cause autoimmune disease and cancer. Rabies is required every three years by local law. Distemper/parvo should be given to puppies. Bordatella (kennel cough) oral vaccine is annual in dogs that board or go to doggie daycare. Other vaccines are optional, not effective, or only last a few months and cause bad reactions that damage and weaken the immune system.

### What is the biggest mistake most pet owners make?

**JS:** Feeding them people food. Not only does human food add extra calories and lead to pets being overweight, but I see a lot more pets for vomiting and having diarrhea because of it.

**SJH:** Pet owners feed poor-quality, cheap, grocery-store brands or only dry food. These contain meat by-products, GMOs, soy or corn, and artificial preservatives. Meat by-products cause GI upset, allergies, and stress the liver and kidneys. Dry food alone is too low in moisture and too high in protein, stressing the kidneys and increasing risk of urinary tract infections.

—Carol Caffin

GENERAL HEALTH

## Off-Label Prescribing

The good, the bad, and the ugly



**Y**our 12-year-old with ADHD is often wired late into the night and has problems sleeping. So his doctor prescribes Clonidine, which is approved by the FDA to treat hypertension, but is often used to treat ADHD-related insomnia, sleep apnea, alcohol and drug withdrawal, and Tourette's syndrome—it's just not approved by the FDA for those conditions.

So why is your child's doctor prescribing it? "It's an example of off-label use of a prescription drug," says Richard Morel, MD, an internist at WESTMED Medical Group. Though off-label prescribing is a common practice—about one in five prescriptions are written for off-label uses, according to a 2012 *Consumer Reports* article—and though it is legal ("once you have a license to practice medicine, you can prescribe any medication for anything you want," says Dr. Morel), an off-label indication may or may not be good for what ails you.

"The FDA will certify a drug for approved use," says Dr. Morel. "Pharmaceutical companies are not allowed to promote off-label uses. They've gotten in trouble for that." Trouble is an understatement. In 2012, GlaxoSmithKline agreed to plead guilty to two counts of introducing misbranded drugs and to pay \$3 billion—the largest sum ever paid by a drug company. The drugs in question: Wellbutrin and Paxil. Though Paxil was never

approved by the FDA for treating depression in kids, GSK unlawfully promoted the drug for that use. It also promoted the antidepressant Wellbutrin for weight loss, treatment of ADHD and sexual dysfunction, and substance addiction.

Still, Dr. Morel says, there are many examples of off-label prescriptions that are accepted as standard of care. "Take aspirin," he says. "It is standard of care for all diabetics because of its cardio-protective effects. In fact, Medicare has it as a quality metric for diabetes care. Yet it is not FDA-approved for that indication."

It is important for physicians to know the standard of care before prescribing off-label. A responsible doctor will not prescribe a medication for an off-label use unless he or she is certain that there are studies backing up its benefits and clinical data to support its use.

"One example of bad off-label prescribing is the use of anti-psychotics like Seroquel and Haldol for Alzheimer's disease," says Dr. Morel. "There's no clinical data to show there's any benefit."

In addition, says Dr. Morel, "some of the anti-psychotics, such as Seroquel, are used for sleep, an off-label use that I'm not comfortable with." The drug, he explains, "can cause weight gain and diabetes; anti-psychotics are serious medicine, and there should be placebo-controlled studies to demonstrate efficacy."

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BEAUTY

## Summer Eye Health

James R. Gordon, MD, a board-certified ophthalmologist and oculoplastic surgeon, has these tips to protect your eyes this summer: "The skin around the eyes is especially thin and delicate. Protect against sun damage and maintain youthful eyelids by wearing sunglasses with UV400 protection to shield fragile tissue around the eyes; applying eye moisturizer with SPF 30 sunblock to hydrate the skin and prevent appearance of fine lines; and using oil-free skin-care products, since products containing oil increase the likelihood of clogged glands around the eyes. Choose formulas with ingredients such as retinol, caffeine, peptides, nicotinic acid, and haloxyl to help fight signs of premature aging."

