

Can I Give My Kitten Pepto-Bismol?

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses why formulations for humans are not suitable for cats.

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Q: Can I give my 6-month-old kitten Pepto-Bismol for throwing up and diarrhea? Is it a safe product for cats?

A: Bismuth subsalicylate (the chief ingredient in Pepto-Bismol) is related to aspirin. Cats are very sensitive to salicylate formulations. They cannot metabolize and excrete them efficiently. I do not recommend Pepto-Bismol for gastrointestinal problems.

I'd steer clear of Kaopectate, too. Kaolin-pectin combinations have been used for decades to treat diarrhea in humans and small animals. The old formulation contained only kaolin and pectin. Later formulations contained an additional ingredient, attapulgite. All three of these substances were very safe in animals because they were not absorbed into the bloodstream after administration; they exerted their effects locally, in the intestine.

In December 2002, however, Kaopectate was reformulated to contain the drug bismuth subsalicylate, the chief ingredient in Pepto-Bismol. A tablespoon of regular- strength Kaopectate contains the equivalent of 130 milligrams of aspirin; the extra-strength formulation has the equivalent of 230 milligrams. One tablespoon of the extra-strength formula would probably cause toxicosis in a 5-pound cat.

For this reason, Kaopectate and Pepto-Bismol are not recommended for feline gastrointestinal problems. Take your kitten to a good veterinarian who will figure out the cause of the vomiting and diarrhea. The focus is on treating the cause, so the problem goes away, rather than just controlling the symptoms.