

Feeding a poorly cat

Cats have very specific feeding requirements - for example they cannot be vegetarians and must have certain fats, proteins and nutrients in order to stay healthy. When a cat is ill or recovering from an operation its body will need energy and nutrients not just for normal bodily functions, but to repair tissues and to fight off disease.

CATS CAN GET THEMSELVES INTO a vicious circle of feeling ill, not eating and becoming depressed. They can respond well to some tender loving care from you and encouragement to eat. Finding things which are tempting and getting it started on eating again can make all the difference to a cat's recovery.

Why is it important for sick cats to eat?

- If a cat is not getting all of the nutrition it needs, its immune system function will be reduced and it will have an increased risk of infections, delayed healing and muscle weakness. The way in which the body deals with certain drugs may also be affected.
- Cats are also very susceptible to the development of a potentially fatal liver disease, called hepatic lipidosis which occurs primarily when a cat is not eating and can occur following even short periods of fasting.
- Cats have high requirements for several important nutrients, and so reduced intake can result in nutritional deficiencies that can prove very detrimental and even fatal to the cat.

When should I worry that my cat is not eating properly?

- If your cat has not eaten for two or more days.
- If your cat has lost a lot of weight, particularly in a short space of time.

What may cause my cat to not eat enough?

The first sign of the majority of illnesses (eg, dental disease, kidney disease, heart disease, liver disease) in cats is reduced appetite. It can sometimes therefore be difficult to find the underlying cause for the lack of appetite and your vet may need to perform tests to help identify the problem.

What should I do if my cat is not eating properly?

Consult your veterinary surgeon if your cat has been off its food for more than two days, or sooner if you have noticed any other problems in addition, eg, excessive drinking or vomiting. This is important, as it does not take long for a cat to become seriously ill if it is not eating.

Encourage eating - but take care

There are quite a few ways to encourage your cat to eat (see back page of this leaflet).



Following a period of sickness you may find that you can never again eat certain foods because they provoke feelings of nausea, associated with that illness. This is known as food aversion and it can be a very important contributing cause of loss of appetite in cats. It occurs when a cat that is feeling unwell is continuously offered food, or force fed. This can lead the cat to associate the feeling of illness with the food, and can result in persistent refusal to eat that food. In order to avoid this occurring food should never be left in front of a cat if it seems to lack appetite, and such cats should not be force fed (eg, syringe feeding).

Are there any types of food I should avoid?

Many human foods contain small amounts of onion or garlic. This can cause toxic damage to cat's red blood cells, which may result in anaemia. Examples of common foods containing onion or garlic include some human baby foods, soups, flavoured meats and food flavourings.

Tips list

What can I do at home to encourage my cat to eat?

- Try to keep the cat's environment stress-free, eg, giving it somewhere quiet to relax away from other cats or dogs so that it does not have to compete for food or a resting place.
- Increase the appeal of the food by adding strong flavours like fish.
- Warm food to body temperature to improve its aroma.
- Gently smear a small amount of food on the cat's paws or face – this usually stimulates a licking response which may then get the cat started on eating again.
- Try particularly tasty foods such as cooked fish or chicken, or commercial supplementary foods, or your vet may prescribe your cat a palatable high calorie food, eg, Hill's a/d.
- Offer small frequent meals, removing the food bowl in between.
- Use wide shallow feed bowls to avoid the cat's whiskers touching the sides as this can sometimes put cats offeating.
- Gently stroke and talk to the cat to help it relax.

www.fabcats.org

FAB's full range of Cat Friendly Practice leaflets

Bringing your cat to the vet
 Giving medicine to your cat
 Feeding a poorly cat
 Your cat is having an operation
 Preventing health problems
 Insuring your cat
 Choosing a boarding cattery
 Common household poisons and cats
 Why do cats..?

For more information on cat care
www.fabcats.org

The Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB)

Set up almost 50 years ago, FAB's work now provides essential information for cat owners and expert information for people working with cats such as veterinary surgeons, breeders, cattery owners and rescue centres. Through our feline expert panel (a group of veterinary surgeons funded by FAB to specialise in feline care at UK veterinary universities) FAB has gathered a wealth of information on both common and rare conditions.

We're not just interested in veterinary treatment; our experts understand that a cat's home environment and lifestyle can have a huge influence on its health and well being. FAB is interested in the whole cat! The more owners understand cats and their behaviour the better they will be at spotting problems and giving tlc when a cat needs it most.

For over 400 pages of information on cat care go to FAB's website. We're already helping over 1 million cat owners a year.

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