

When Your Cat Doesn't Want to Eat

When cats are unwell temporarily or when they are suffering from a chronic disease, it can be a challenge to get them to eat. The following are some tips for how to coax the reluctant eater back to the food dish.

1. Warm the food. Even if your cat has eaten room temperature, or even cold food from the refrigerator, their entire lives....many cats can be enticed back to their food simply by warming it up. The easiest way to do this is by putting the food on a microwaveable dish and cooking it on "high" for about 7 to 8 seconds. Microwaves vary, so you may need to do a little more or a little less than this amount. Before giving it to your cat, be sure to stir it around to avoid hot spots and test the temperature with your finger to make sure it is not too hot.

2. Change it up! Many a finicky cat can be convinced to start eating again by offering something new and interesting. Choose something that smells particularly awful (i.e.--wonderful to the cat) like a fish-flavored variety. Experiment with different textures and gravies (as long as your cat is not sensitive to gluten).

3. Use a flavor enhancing powder such as Fortiflora. This is a probiotic that can be purchased at your veterinarian and comes in packets. You can use up to one full packet per day, so it is okay to sprinkle it out over several meals over the course of the day. Many cats like this powder sprinkled over their food and then mixed with a bit of warm water to make a sauce.

4. Try different serving dishes. Some cats will decide they only want to eat out of a dish in which their whiskers do not touch the sides. So, for these, a flat plate will work best. Some cats refuse to eat out of plastic, styrofoam or paper. Others do not like stainless steel and insist on ceramic. If your cat is feeling finicky, you may need to experiment with offering food on a different type(s) of dish. This is always worth a try, even if your cat has eaten out of the same bowl his entire life. When a cat doesn't feel well....all of the rules can change in the blink of an eye!

5. When all else fails, do not give up. Call your veterinarian to talk about using an appetite stimulant. There are many safe medications for this purpose and your vet is likely to have one or more of them on hand.