

Pet Health Articles



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Giving Pills to Cats

What is the easiest way to give my cat a pill?



Giving pills to cats can be challenging, even for the most experienced veterinarian. The easiest way to give your cat a pill is to hide it in a small amount of wet cat food, tuna, or a soft treat that can be molded around the pill (e.g., pill pockets, frozen butter). Offer pills when your cat is hungry.

To ensure your cat swallows the pill, place it in a small amount of food that your cat is certain to eat, rather than a large portion that she may not complete. Some cats may spit out the pill, so it is important to watch your cat while administering the medication and afterward.

If your cat persists in spitting out the pills or if dietary restrictions prevent you from hiding the pills in food, try putting the pill directly into your cat's mouth, a process called "pillling". Make sure you have carefully read the prescription label and understand the dosing instructions. Although medicating your cat can be intimidating, try to remain calm and confident, as your cat is likely to pick up on your stress.

Here are some tips to keep in mind before you begin:

- Prepare a safe place to handle your cat with minimal distractions. Have the pill ready and easily accessible.
- Never interrupt eating, drinking, grooming, or litter box time to pill your cat.
- If you are giving the medication on your own, you may find it easiest to place your cat in your lap. It may be simpler for you to wrap your cat securely in a blanket or towel with only her head exposed.

How do I give a pill directly into my cat's mouth?

1. Lubricate the pill with a bit of butter, gravy from canned food, or a piece of a soft treat so it is easier to swallow.
2. Hold the pill between the thumb and index finger on your dominant hand.
3. With your other hand, gently grasp your cat's head from above by placing your thumb on one side of the upper jaw and your fingers on the other.
4. Tilt your cat's head back, pointing her nose upwards. Her jaw should drop open slightly.
5. With your pilling hand, use your little finger and ring finger to open your cat's mouth further by gently putting pressure on the lower lip and front teeth.
6. Quickly place the pill as far back over the tongue as possible, then close your cat's mouth and hold it closed while you return her head to a

normal position. Try to place the pill on the back one-third of the tongue to stimulate an automatic swallowing reflex.

7. Gently rub your cat's nose or throat or blow lightly on her nose to stimulate swallowing. Usually, a cat will lick its nose if it has swallowed the pill.

8. Use a syringe to squirt a bit of water into your cat's mouth to help them swallow or offer something soft and tasty like tuna juice or liquid treat.

9. Immediately after pilling, give your cat some positive reinforcement (e.g., treat, brushing, petting, or playing).

What if my cat still doesn't swallow the pill?

If you continue to have difficulty, you may want to purchase a "pet piller" device, which helps deliver the pill to the back of the mouth.

If you find that giving your cat a pill is a frustrating experience (for you and your cat), speak to your veterinarian for advice. It may be possible to have the medication compounded into a flavored liquid or treat. Veterinary pharmacies can prepare many medications into liquid or treat formulas with appealing flavors such as tuna, chicken, or salmon. Some medications can even be made into a gel that can be rubbed onto the ear flap and absorbed through the skin.

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