



Giving Pills to Cats

Giving your cat a pill can be a challenge even for the most experienced veterinarian! The easiest way to give your cat a pill is to hide the pill in food or pill pocket. This usually works best if the pill is hidden in a small amount of tuna, salmon, yogurt or cream cheese. To ensure that your cat swallows the pill, it is better to place it in a small amount of food that the cat is certain to eat rather than a large portion that the cat may not complete. Some cats may spit out the pill, so it is important to observe your cat both during and shortly after eating a medicated bowl of food.

If your cat persists in spitting out the pills or if dietary restrictions prevent you from hiding the pills in an appealing food or treat, you will need to administer the pill directly into the cat's mouth. Make sure that you have carefully read the prescription label and understand the dosing instructions.

Follow these steps when administering a pill to your cat:

- Prepare a safe place to handle your cat. Have the pill ready and in a place where it will be easily accessible.
- If you are administering the medication on your own, you may find it easiest to place your cat in your lap with his/her rear against you. It may be simpler for you to wrap the cat securely in a blanket or towel with only the head exposed.
- You can lubricate or "grease" the pill with a very small amount of margarine or butter so it doesn't stick in your cat's mouth or throat and will be easier to swallow. This may be helpful with the administration of capsules.
- Hold the pill between your thumb and index finger. (Use your dominant hand – for example, if you are right-handed, use your right hand).
- Gently grasp your cat's head from above with your other hand, by placing your thumb on one side of the upper jaw and your fingers on the other. Tilt the cat's head back over its shoulder so that its nose points to the ceiling. The jaw should drop open slightly.
- With your pilling hand, use your little finger and ring finger to open the cat's mouth further by gently putting pressure on the lower lip and front teeth.
- Quickly place the pill as far back over the tongue as possible. Try to place it on the back one-third of the tongue to stimulate an automatic swallowing reflex.
- Close the cat's mouth and hold it closed while you return the head to a normal position.
- Gently rub the cat's nose or throat, or blow lightly on the nose. This should stimulate swallowing. Usually, the cat will lick its nose with its tongue if it has swallowed the pill. In some cases, it may help the cat swallow the pill better if you follow the pill with a little tuna juice, flavored broth, or water squirted into the mouth with a syringe.



- If you have trouble with this method of opening the mouth, try placing the cat on an elevated table. Holding the cat by the scruff of the neck, lift it so that the front paws come off the table. The mouth will drop open. Quickly place the pill as far back on the tongue as possible, as in the previous method.
- If you continue to experience difficulty, you may want to purchase a "pet piller" device.

If you find that giving your cat a pill is a frustrating experience, it may be possible to have the medication compounded into a flavored formulation. Veterinary pharmacies can prepare many of the more common medications into liquid formulas with appealing flavors such as tuna, chicken, or salmon.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

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