

# Conditioning Your Pet to Take Medication

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It is easiest and most effective to condition your pet to take medication when healthy, before your pet's appetite may be affected by illness or injury and giving medications is critical. Begin working at mealtime, when your pet is already hungry. Portions of the daily meal may be used for training.

Dogs and cats may refuse familiar foods when taste and texture are altered by the addition of tablets, capsules or powders. Adding a textural element helps disguise the presence of medication in a portion of food, as does developing a predictable medicating routine that your pet knows and enjoys.

## Find foods your pet likes

Make sure they contain no garlic, onions, raisins, or artificial sweetener:

- Cream cheese
- Salmon cream cheese
- Processed/soft cheese
- Bacon-flavored processed cheese
- Processed meat
- Braunschweiger
- Marshmallow creme
- Peanut butter
- Pate-style canned food
- Pill Pockets
- Hot dogs or Vienna sausage
- Mashed potatoes
- Plain Greek yogurt
- Softly scrambled egg
- Tuna fudge
- Whipped cream
- Nutri-Cal paste

Practice with a variety of foods. Size matters; the food should be about twice the size of the capsule or tablet. If larger, the medication inside is easier to detect and separate from the food. When practicing with no medication, use pea-sized pieces.



## Add texture

Add crispy or crunchy food to the pea-sized pieces of soft food to disguise the texture of an added medication. Good choices include crushed potato chips, panko, pita chips, dog or cat food, tortilla chips, cheese crackers, cereal crumbs (no raisins), bacon bits, crushed cheese curls, etc. The textural ingredient can be sprinkled over the food, or dipped into/rolled in the additive.

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### Techniques

#### 1-2-3 Method

Make three portions of food complete with textural additive. Feed them one at a time in quick succession, so the dog or cat happily anticipates three portions in a row. When the dog or cat is excited to eat three bites in a row, add medication when/if needed to the middle portion. It may help to develop a cue for medication, for example, 'Here are your snacks!' or any phrase that you like. Just add the phrase right before feeding the first portion of food. This helps your pet learn that the cue equals three portions of delicious food.

#### Grass is Always Greener Method

If it is safe to do, feed any other animal or person in the house — preferably a dog or cat — the first bite. The competition for a bite of food increases the chance of acceptance, so feed the pet who needs to be medicated the second bite. Alternate three portions between the dog and the other animal or human as in the 1-2-3 method. Make absolutely certain that the patient who needs the medication gets the portion with the pill or capsule inside.

### Conditioning to Liquid Medication

Use tuna juice, meat baby food, plain yogurt or Hill's A/D.

- Feed from a syringe, preferably a slip luer or oral syringe. If the cat will not approach the syringe, feed near a syringe, gradually working up to a little food on the outside of the syringe, then eventually eating right from the syringe itself.
- Make sure to work at the comfort level of your cat; they should engage and happily participate. If not, go back a step until they eagerly approach. It is more important for the cat to be comfortable with the presence of the syringe than it is to make speedy progress. It may take some experimenting to find a food your cat likes, but worth it when both owner and cat are comfortable with medicating.
- When your cat will eat from the syringe eagerly, mix in liquid medication. It may be helpful to use the 1-2-3 Method and use three syringes; the middle dose should have the medication.

### Techniques for Pets on Special Diets

Canned prescription diet, or foods listed on page 1 that are approved by your veterinarian, can be used to give the pills. For the textural additive, use crushed dry diet or any foods approved by your veterinarian. Marshmallow creme is often acceptable for all but the most limited allergy and diabetic diets.

### Tips and Tricks

- For bitter medications like metronidazole, enclose the tablet in an empty gelatin capsule before coating with food. These are available at health food stores and online.
- Some medication can be compounded into chewable form; ask your veterinarian if this is possible.
- Some medications need to be given with a syringe of water to wash them down. Tuna juice, coconut milk or meat broth is a great substitute for water. Your veterinarian will instruct you if the medication your pet is taking requires this.

### Tuna or Salmon Fudge

2 6-oz cans undrained tuna; or 1 15-oz can undrained deboned salmon; or 12 oz. meat baby food, or butternut squash or pumpkin baby food\*

2 eggs

1 ½ cups flour

¼ cup Parmesan cheese or nutritional yeast

Optional: ¼ cup bacon bits

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix all ingredients together into a stiff dough and press into a parchment-lined or greased 9" x 13" pan. Bake for 20 minutes. Cool and dice into small cubes. Refrigerate or freeze. Makes approximately 4 cups.

\*Canned or cold cooked, mashed pumpkin or butternut squash can be used, though a small amount of liquid may need to be added to achieve a stiff dough.