

TIPS FOR TAILS

If you are a pet guardian, the one thing you may have noticed is that cats are just about as different to dogs as you can imagine. One way they are totally different is their approach to food. Cats are incredibly finicky whereas with a dog you can normally throw down the food and it will be gone before you can say the word “kibble”.

Having lived with five cats at one time, all of different ages, and having volunteered at a cat shelter for many years, I have learnt some different ways to ‘encourage’ them to eat, especially things they don’t want to eat, such as vitamins and supplements. Also, as a Tellington TTouch Practitioner, I have come across dogs who due to stress or health issues have to be tempted to eat. Here are a few practical suggestions for either cats or cats and dogs, when changing the type and make of food has been tried and has not worked.

Tips for Eating

- Warm up the food to room temperature. Cats and some dogs prefer their food warm rather than cold.
- The smell of food cooking: there is nothing more likely to get the salivary glands working. You can quickly cool it down by putting it in the freezer for 30 seconds.
- Some cats like different food bowls. Some cats prefer more of a flat plate and others like a curved bowl.
- For senior cats or dogs, or those with issues such as arthritis, having raised feeding and drinking bowls makes eating and drinking more comfortable.
- Small amounts: with any animal who has gone off its food or one that you are encouraging to eat, give a small amount of food on the plate. A large amount can be overwhelming. You can give more as they eat it.
- Some cats like two kinds of wet food on their plate or to have wet and dry mixed together, others prefer only one. You have to experiment and see what they like and don’t like!
- Some cats and dogs, especially old or ill animals, may need you to ‘introduce’ them to their food by making a connection to it with your hand or finger. So reach down and show them the food, or put your finger in it and swirl it around.
- Never leave wet uneaten food down for longer than 45 minutes. It will start to go off. Your pet will soon learn that you do this and it will encourage them to eat it when you give it to them, and it will keep them healthier.
- Hand-feeding a dog may sometimes be the only way to encourage a sick or old dog to eat. You have to do what you have to do!

Tips for Giving Medications and Supplements

- Slowly and gently stroke your pet and speak to them in soft tones. The contact will calm and soothe them, and move them out of a flight or fight response.
- Always give a treat after and sometimes even before giving medications, supplements or anything the dog or cat doesn’t like. Animals learn by association and they will start to associate the not-so-nice stuff with the treat.

- With cats and some small dogs, crushing a pill in a small amount of water, tuna juice, chicken broth, or something the pet likes and then giving it in a syringe is a good solution, but be mindful not to give too much at one time. Cats have a convenient gap in their teeth on the sides of their mouths, behind the canine teeth and in front of the premolars, which neatly gives room for a syringe to have access.
- For most dogs hiding a pill in their food or a 'pill pocket', which is a treat with a hole in it for the pill, is an easy solution. For cats, a wonderful new UK product called 'Lick e Lix' by Webbox can be very helpful in giving supplements and medications to a cat. It is a treat in a yoghurt-like constituency which comes in different flavours such as salmon and chicken. Most cats cannot resist it but some may need further encouragement. Here are some tips with this and any other mixtures you may come up with.
 - (a) Wait until the cat is sitting or lying down; they need to be in their parasympathetic nervous system.
 - (b) Have lots of patience and time. Do not have an agenda. "I have to get this done before I go to work." You will need to go at their speed. Sometimes you may need to wait 30 minutes and try again.
 - (c) You may have to make a connection with the mixture by putting some on your index finger and waving it under their nose so the smell will entice them to lick it off. If this doesn't work, gently tap a little on their mouth so they have to start eating it.
 - (d) Then encourage them to lick it off your finger.
 - (e) If this doesn't work start by putting the mixture on a paw. Once they have licked it off put more on the paw, or perhaps on both paws. Now they may start licking it off your finger and then transition to the bowl, or you might have to go back to putting in on their paws. Every cat is different and every time is different.
 - (f) Give the cat time to digest. They may look away, get up from a lying to a sitting position, start to walk away or pretend to be distracted but they may be giving their digestive systems time to work.
 - (g) Do not speak to them. Leave saying "good boy" or "good girl" until they have finished. It will distract them.

Armed with some of these tips, encouraging your dog or cat to eat food and/or supplements may be successful. Of course, if your cat or dog continues to refuse food for three days there may be an underlying physical problem, so take them to the vet at once.