



Feline Anorexia

There are many reasons cats will not eat their normal diet. They may have an underlying disease condition such as upper respiratory infection, pancreatitis, kidney disease or cancer. Occasionally cats will suffer bouts of anxiety related to household changes, i.e. a new home, variations of work schedules or a new baby, that lead to a decreased or absent appetite. Whatever the cause, it is important to get your cat eating as quickly as possible. Serious complications can occur such as liver failure, starvation and death due to lack of proper nutrition. Cats that don't eat for 4-5 days or longer can develop fatty liver disease requiring aggressive treatment.

It is important to realize that cats are very finicky and will often resist new foods when offered. It is critical to avoid creating a food aversion by trying to force-feed cats. It will be necessary to place either a nasogastric tube in its nose or an esophageal/stomach tube to feed properly if we cannot get a cat to eat by using the following suggestions:

1. Treatment for underlying disorder is absolutely the first step.
2. Supportive care:
 - a. Maintain hydration using electrolyte-containing fluids given orally, subcutaneously or intravenously.
 - b. Provide supplemental heat if body temperature is low. How water bottles are safer than electric blankets which can cause burns.
 - c. Manage pain, if present.
 - d. Use of anti-nausea medications such as Reglan to help prevent vomiting.
 - e. Supplement with B-vitamins.
3. Feed in a wide shallow bowl. Cats don't appreciate deep bowls which trap their whiskers.
4. Do not medicate at feeding time.
5. Increase palatability of diet by increasing moisture and fat content; use food containing a moderate amount of protein; use monosodium glutamate (Accent); and consider foods with a strong aroma.
6. Consider adding toppings to diet (tuna juice, boiled chicken, bits of fish, etc.).
7. Try novel foods that your cat has never tried before, Fancy Feast has many varieties.
8. Place small amounts of food on the cat's paw or lips. Try hand feeding.
9. Petting may stimulate food intake.
10. Occasionally, cats with a food aversion **will** eat cold foods.
11. Try warming food to increase the aroma associated with it.
12. Try coaxing with foods such as A/D, Eukanuba Recovery Diet, or baby food without onion powder.
13. Depending on the reason for your cat's anorexia, certain drug treatments may be useful.