

Administering Medications to Your Cat

- Before you leave your veterinarian's office with a new medication, be sure to address any concerns or questions with your veterinary team.
- It is very important to follow all label directions carefully.
- Do not risk being bitten, scratched, or otherwise injured while trying to medicate your cat. If you are unable to administer medication, your veterinarian may be able to offer other options.

Understanding the Medication Instructions

The first part of successfully administering medication to your cat is to ensure that you understand the instructions for giving the medication. These instructions include route of administration (for example, by mouth, into the ears, or into the eyes), dosing frequency (for example, once daily, every 12 hours, or every 8 hours), duration of treatment (for example, 7 days, until gone), and other special considerations (for example, give with food, follow with water).

Sometimes there is flexibility with medication instructions; for example, some medications can be given "as needed," or a twice-daily dosing schedule may be adaptable to once-daily dosing. However, for other medications, the recommended dosing instructions need to be followed closely. Before you leave your veterinarian's office with a new medication, be sure to address any concerns or questions regarding the medication with your veterinary team. For example, if your work schedule does not permit dosing every 8 hours, your veterinarian may be able to recommend a different medication that can be given less frequently. Ask about your pet's expected response to the treatment.

It is very helpful to write a medication schedule for your pet on a calendar, including the date and time that the medication needs to be administered. This will help you to (1) avoid forgetting to give a

dose and (2) remember when the course of treatment is completed. It is also very important to follow all label directions carefully. Improper storage (for example, keeping a refrigerated medication at room temperature) can affect the safety and effectiveness of medication. Additionally, it is important to give the medication for the correct length of time. Complications can occur if antibiotics are not given for the full duration of recommended treatment; in addition, some medications (such as corticosteroids) cannot be discontinued without causing illness, so it is very important to give medications as directed. If your pet experiences any medication-related side effects, contact your veterinarian promptly for advice before adjusting a dosage or discontinuing the medication.

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Administering Pills

If you've never given a cat medication before, it can be difficult to know what method will work best. Some cats take pills very readily if the pill is hidden inside a treat or given with a small amount of canned cat food. Another option is canned tuna or salmon for people. Pills can also be crushed (or capsules broken and emptied) and mixed with a small amount of canned food. However, your cat must eat all of the food right away to ensure receiving the full medication dose. Also, some coated pills and capsules have a bitter taste if the capsule or coating is removed. If the medication makes the food taste badly, your cat may refuse to eat it. Before choosing one of these options, ask your veterinarian if the medication can be given

with food. You will probably know after the first or second dosing if this method will work.

If you must give your cat a pill directly by mouth, here's a method that usually works. This technique takes practice and may require more than one attempt to get your cat to swallow the pill. If your cat is not used to having your hands around his or her mouth (as with toothbrushing, for example), gradually introduce your cat to this by stroking your cat's face and neck for a few moments. This should calm your cat. If you think that your cat may try to bite or scratch, do not attempt this technique; ask your veterinarian for alternative medication options:

- **Restraint:** If your cat is well-behaved, place a towel across your lap and hold your cat gently on your lap. If you think your cat may try to scratch you or get away, you may want to wrap his body, feet, and legs in a towel; leave the head out so that you can give the medication.
- Hold the pill between the thumb and index finger of your right hand (if you are right-handed).
- Using your left hand, reach over the top of your cat's head and squeeze your thumb and middle finger between your cat's upper and lower teeth. Try to stay close to the back of the mouth (near the molars) and away from the canines (the long, pointy teeth near the front of the mouth). If you're doing this properly, the sides of the upper lip will curl in as your fingers curl in.
- Once your fingers are inside your cat's mouth, gently tilt your cat's head back to encourage your cat to open his or her mouth.
- Once the mouth is open, use your right index finger and thumb to place the pill near the base of the tongue. Then remove your hands quickly so your cat can swallow.
- Rub your cat's throat lightly to encourage swallowing. Offering a small amount of water can also help.

Administering Liquid Medication

Some pet owners prefer liquid medication because administration does not require placing your fingers inside of your cat's mouth. However, if your cat

refuses to swallow the liquid, this method may not be ideal. Here are some tips for administering liquid medication:

- **Restraint:** If your cat is well-behaved, place a towel across your lap and hold your cat gently on your lap. If you think your cat may try to scratch or get away, you may want to wrap his or her body, feet, and legs in a towel; leave the head out so that you can give the medication.
- Draw the medication into the dropper or syringe, and hold it in your right hand (if you are right-handed).

Do not risk being bitten, scratched, or otherwise injured while trying to medicate your cat. If you are unable to administer medication, your veterinarian may be able to offer other options.

- Place your left hand behind your cat's head to stabilize it. You can gently stroke the back of the head and speak softly to your cat to distract and comfort him or her.
- Using your right hand, insert the tip of the dropper or syringe into the side of your cat's mouth. Try to stay close to the molars and away from the canine teeth.
- Once the tip is inside, empty the medication into the mouth and release your cat's head.
- Rub the throat lightly to encourage swallowing.

Troubleshooting Tips

If you are unable to administer medications to your cat, here are some suggestions that may help:

- ***You may need help:*** If your cat won't cooperate with receiving medication, ask someone to help you restrain your cat while you control the head and give the medication.
- ***Do not risk injury:*** Do not risk being bitten, scratched, or otherwise injured while trying to

medicate your pet. If you are unable to administer medication, call your veterinarian and request advice or assistance.

- **Ask your veterinarian if a different formulation is available:** Some medications are available in several forms, including pills, liquid given by mouth with an eye dropper or syringe, chewable flavored treats, and transdermal gels (the gel is absorbed into the bloodstream after being applied to the skin). If one formulation
- doesn't work for you, ask your veterinarian if there is another option for the medication your pet is receiving.
- **Consider asking the pros:** Some veterinarians can arrange daily outpatient appointments for a technician or assistant to administer your cat's medication. If your schedule doesn't permit this, some veterinarians may be able to board your cat so that medication can be given until the course of treatment is completed.