

Giving Your Cat a Pill



It can be difficult to give a cat a pill, and some cats get so upset by the pilling process that they start avoiding their pet parents altogether. For this reason, scientists have searched for alternative ways to give cats medicine.

One approach tried with medications sometimes used to treat fear and anxiety problems (TCAs and SSRIs) was to give the drug transdermally (through the skin).

This was usually done by putting medicine on cats' ears. However, researchers discovered that only 10% of the medicine was actually absorbed. (Because of this, SSRIs should not be given through the skin.)

A better approach for getting your cat to take her medicine is to find a pharmacist who will compound the medicine for you. After making it into a powder or a liquid, you can put the medicine into a strong-tasting and strong-smelling liquid that your cat likes, like tuna oil. If you give your cat a bit of tuna in oil for a few days in a row, you can then add the medicine to the tuna oil. If your cat won't eat the mixture, use less medicine at first and gradually add more as your cat accepts it.

Teach Your Cat to Take Her Medicine

You can also use behavior modification to help your cat accept having liquid put in her mouth by following these steps:

1. First, call your cat to a place she likes, such as the area where you keep her food dish. When she comes, give her one of her favorite cat treats. (If your cat doesn't like cat treats, try something more exciting, like small pieces of fish or chicken.)
2. Gently put your hand on her jaw and hold it for a very brief moment. (Try to release her before she tries to get away.) Just before you release your cat, say "Yes," and then quickly give her a treat.
3. Practice steps one and two for a couple of weeks, gradually increasing the time that you hold your cat's jaw. Progress in very slow steps. First, increase from one second to two seconds. When your cat seems totally comfortable with that and doesn't struggle to get away, you can increase to three seconds. Then increase to four seconds, then five, etc.
4. When your cat will let you hold her jaw for 8 to 10 seconds, help her get her used to letting you stick your finger just inside her mouth. Again, start slowly. Only put your finger in her mouth for a second at first. Say "Yes" just before you remove your finger, and then quickly give

your cat a treat. When you can put your finger in your cat's mouth for about three seconds, proceed to the next step.

5. Now you can teach your cat to allow you to open her mouth. Open her mouth, just a little, for only a second. Before letting go of your cat, say "Yes." Then give her a treat. Repeat this step until your cat doesn't resist when you try to open her mouth.

6. When you can open your cat's mouth wide enough, slip a small bit of treat inside, say "Yes," and give her a second treat. When your cat seems comfortable with this step, you can move on to Step 7.

7. Finally, open your cat's mouth, slip in a treat with medicine juice on it, say "Yes," and give her a real treat.

Where to Find Help

If you need help, a qualified animal behavior expert can give you additional advice and guide you through the steps above. Please see our article, [Finding Professional Help](#), to locate a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) in your area.