

Giving Oral Medications to a Cat

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care. Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian will tell you if your cat's medication(s) can be given with food or if it must be given on an empty stomach. If the tablet or capsule can be given with food, you may make a "meatball" by placing the medication in the center of a small ball of canned cat food or cheese. Always give a test "meatball" to your cat to make sure she is willing eat it and also to see if she chews it or gulps it whole. Cats are more likely to chew their food than are dogs, so cats often will eat the "meatball" and spit out the tablet or capsule. This causes the tablet or capsule to partially dissolve and become very hard to handle. If the cat bites into the tablet or capsule, which will leave a bad taste in her mouth, she will be harder to medicate on the second attempt. So, you will have to decide what works best with your cat.

The following instructions are presented to help you give medications if you cannot give the medicine in a "meatball". Use caution when giving a cat oral medication to avoid a bite. A cat's mouth contains many bacteria and cat bites are often deep punctures. If you are bitten by your cat, clean the wound thoroughly and seek medical attention.



Medications for oral administration may be in pill, capsule or liquid form.



Hold the cat's head from the top using your left hand if you are right-handed. The cat's cheek-bones (called zygomatic arches) provide a convenient handle by which to hold the head firmly without causing the cat any discomfort.



Tilt the head back and the cat will often drop its lower jaw open.



Hold the pill or capsule in your right hand between your thumb and index finger. You can place one of the remaining fingers on your right hand on the lower incisors to keep the lower jaw open. Keep your finger over the small incisor teeth NOT over the sharp fangs (canine teeth). Drop the pill or capsule as far back over the tongue as possible, then immediately close the mouth and blow on the cat's nose which will

encourage them to swallow.



If the cat does not open its mouth when you tilt back the head, holding the pill as before between the thumb and index finger...



...use the middle finger of the same hand holding the pill or capsule, to pry open the lower jaw. Place your middle finger over the small incisor teeth NOT over the sharp fangs (canine teeth)...



...and pull open the lower jaw.



Keep the middle finger in place to hold the lower jaw open (3), then either drop the pill or capsule as far back on the tongue as possible, or the index finger (1) and thumb (2) can be used to push the pill over the back of the tongue.



IMPORTANT: If you use your thumb and index finger to push the pill over the base of the tongue, your fingers will be inside the cat's mouth and you must work rapidly to avoid getting bit.

Close the mouth and stroke the cat's neck or blow sharply on his/her nose to encourage the cat to swallow



There are several styles of pilling devices that can be used to place a pill or capsule over the base of the tongue so that you do not have to place your fingers in the cat's mouth.

There are several ways to hold the pilling device.



You can hold the device between your thumb and middle finger, with the index finger positioned to "push" the trigger. Or to prevent premature release of the pill, move the index finger to push the trigger just before dislodging the pill in the back of the throat.



You could also hold the device between curled fingers and palm either with the thumb positioned to "push" the trigger. Or to prevent premature release of the pill, you may move the thumb to push the trigger just before dislodging the pill in the back of the throat.



Or you can hold the device between the index and middle fingers with the thumb positioned to "push" the trigger.



Tilt the head back and the cat will often drop their lower jaw open. Insert the pill at the end of the pilling device over the base of the tongue.



If the cat doesn't open it's mouth, use the middle finger of the hand holding the pilling device to open the lower jaw.



Insert the pill at the end of the pilling device over the base of the tongue.



Push the plunger on the pilling device with your thumb or index finger to deposit the pill far back in the cat's mouth.



Liquid medications are given in a pouch between the teeth and cheek. The medication is quickly squirted into this pouch, the mouth is held closed and the neck stroked or the nose sharply blown on to encourage the cat to swallow.

Liquids are more likely to accidentally enter the windpipe compared to pills or capsules. To avoid the cat inhaling liquid into the windpipe, **DO NOT** tilt the cat's head backward.

If you find it difficult to give your cat a pill or capsule, speak to your veterinarian about suspending the pill or capsule into a liquid. Some medications can be suspended in liquid while others lose their effectiveness when placed in a suspension. Always talk to your veterinarian before altering the medication.

Photographs by Henry Moore

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