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Giving Oral Medications to Your Cat

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 food or cheese. Always give a test "meatball" to your cat to make sure she is willing to eat it and also to see if she chews or gulps it whole. Cats are more likely to chew their food than 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. Many medications that come in capsules can be opened and sprinkled onto a small amount of wet food. This works best if your cat is hungry. Try withholding food overnight and offering a small amount of tasty wet food with the capsule sprinkled in. Adding a package of Fortiflora can help make the food more enticing.

The following instructions are presented to help you give medications if you cannot give the medicine in a "meatball" or sprinkled on wet food. 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 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 and 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 and pull open the lower jaw.
 - 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
 - If giving your cat a liquid medication, do NOT tilt the cat's head backward as liquids are more likely to accidentally enter the windpipe compared to pills or capsules.

Adapted from Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine "Giving Oral Medications to Your Cat"