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# Comforting Solutions for waning appetites

When kitty turns up his nose at mealtime, it's time to lend a helping paw.

BY ARDEN MOORE

**y**ou strive to purchase what you hope is a highly nutritious brand of food for your cat. You dutifully provide fresh water in bowls daily. You do your best to engage your cat in regular play sessions. But you are at a loss for why your cat is now sniffing the food and walking away. Or is a no-show at mealtime in your multi-pet household. Or is turning into a way-too-skinny cat.

"Never dismiss changes in your cat's behavior or appetite," says Dr. Kathryn Primm, owner of the Applebrook Animal Hospital in Ooltewah, Tennessee, and host of the *Nine Lives with Dr. Kat* podcast on Pet Life Radio. "Always reach out to your veterinarian and work together to identify the issue and find the best solution."

## Behind food avoidance

What is causing this food avoidance?

Topping the list of contenders:

- Anxiety and stress
- Effects of aging
- Nauseated reaction to medications
- A broken tooth or dental issue that causes mouth pain
- Diseases, such as diabetes, intestinal lymphoma, urinary tract infections and liver disease
- Ingestion of foreign objects that cause stomach blockages
- Eating poisonous plants →



## Comforting Solutions

When eating habits go awry, it's time to play pet detective and report any changes — even subtle ones — to your veterinarian. Stress and anxiety can take a physical and emotional toll on your cat and cause her to boycott food, vomit and have chronic diarrhea.

"Stress can make a negative impact on the levels of cortisol in the brain that can change appetite and cause urinary tract issues," Dr. Primm says. "People don't realize how sensitive cats are to subtle changes and how tuned in they are to everything going on in the house. Separation anxiety and stress can cause them to avoid the litter box and find another place in your house to eliminate where they feel safer."

Cats are more subtle in expressing their feelings than dogs, but you may see them showing up as changes in eating habits. They may be due to separation anxiety, the introduction of an energetic new kitten or changes in mealtime routines.

### Simple solutions

Let's take a closer look at some comforting solutions to address stress, nausea, disease and unexpected dangerous household items that can cause waning appetites:

**1 Tone down the mealtime feeding atmosphere.** "Some cats feel stressed when all the pets are congregated in the kitchen while the person is preparing their food bowls," says Dr. Elizabeth Colleran, past president of the American Association of Feline Practitioners, who operates the cat-only Chico Hospital for Cats in Chico, California. "People are not aware of this stress. Consider placing the pets in closed rooms while preparing the food."

**2 Keep younger cats away from your senior feline.** "Cats will not eat well if they feel they have to compete at mealtime," Dr. Colleran says. "Older cats cannot defend themselves around younger cats. No older cat wants to get slapped around by

a 4-year-old cat. All cats need and deserve their own safe place to eat without other cats lurking around."

### 3 Resist the temptation to buy a bunch of different cat foods.

"If your cat is walking away from the food bowl, never buy a smorgasbord of canned foods to have your cat try," Dr. Primm says. "That is a huge mistake. Because cats are hunters, they associate feelings of nausea with what they hunted and ate. You risk your cat associating all these new cans of food with the feeling of nausea."

Churu or Hartz Delectables, and then add the medicine. "These lickable treats are no replacements for a complete and balanced diet for cats, but they are proving helpful to get a cat to take medication or to top a bowl of food to help a cat to get past the initial reluctance and to start eating," she says.

### 6 Tempt texture-driven cats with crunchy treats.

Try crushing freeze-dried treats into a powder and sprinkling it on top of the food to jump-start a cat to eat. "My cats, Opie and Andy, love the texture of these freeze-



**4 Treat your cat to baby food.** Dr. Primm highly recommends Beech-Nut Stage 2 chicken-flavored baby food to boost appetites in cats. "Certainly, it is not a balanced diet, but it contains 90% water and most cats like the texture of this baby food," she says. "Plus, it is easy for them to digest."

**5 Disguise needed pills or liquid medicine in lickable treats.** Dr. Colleran has seen success when she instructs her clients to let their cats take a few licks of lickable treats, such as

dried chicken treats," Dr. Colleran says. "We call it chicken dust and we put it on top of the canned food to encourage them to eat."

**7 Create the right environment.** "Providing an enriched environment for your cat by introducing food puzzles, scheduling one-on-one play with your cat and making sure there is one litter box per cat plus one and that they are not located in one room can go a long way in reducing stress and lack of appetite in cats," Dr. Primm says.

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**8 Double check the identity of your houseplants.** Lilies are downright deadly to cats. Other plants, such as philodendrons cause stomach upset, irritation to the mouth and difficulty swallowing. For a complete list of safe and toxic plants to cats, visit the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control page at [aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants](http://aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants).

**9 Ask your veterinarian about new ways to fight nausea.** Some cats develop nausea when taking some needed medications. Fortunately, there are new appetite stimulants to boost appetites. "Appetite stimulants are fairly new on the scene and they do work," Dr. Primm says. She recommends you ask your veterinarian about Mirtazapine, a gel that is rubbed into

a cat's ear. Dr. Colleran also suggests Cerenia, a pill that can be crushed to fend off nausea and vomiting plus a new pain medication called Solensia that is given subcutaneously to treat chronic pain like osteoarthritis. "Solensia is given once a month at the veterinary clinic," says Dr. Colleran, "protecting the relationship between cats and caretakers so people don't have to wrestle with their cats every day to give them pain medication." 🐾



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## Kitty not feeling well?

Give her some comfort with these products.

\$25.02 (pack of 18).

**Digestive Support Chicken Meal Topper with Bone Broth;** [madebynacho.com](http://madebynacho.com)

\$21.48 (case of 12).

**Tiki Cat Special Function Formula Fussy Wet Cat Food;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)

\$44.99 (14-ounce bag).

**Lafeber EmerAid Sustain HDN Feline Senior Cat Food;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)

\$1.20.

**Beech-Nut Stage 2 Chicken-Flavored Baby Food;** [walmart.com](http://walmart.com)

\$12.94 (pack of 12).

**Hartz Delectables Bisque Lickable Cat Treats Variety Pack;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)

\$32.99 (50 tubes).

**Inaba Churu Tuna & Chicken Puree Lickable Cat Treat Variety Pack;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)

\$8.49.

**PureBites Chicken Breast Freeze-Dried Cat Treats;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)

\$17.95

(pack of three).

**Kitty Rade Isotonic Drink;** [chewy.com](http://chewy.com)



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