

Foster Cats with Poor Appetite

Cats are unique (and very frustrating!!!) in that they can be very finicky about what they eat especially when they don't feel well. They can refuse to eat for long enough that they can actually starve to death. It is very important to try to get them to eat as soon as possible to avoid serious complications.

One major problem occurs when an overweight cat stops eating and loses weight quickly. The large amount of fat that breaks down will accumulate in the liver and cause Fatty Liver Disease (aka Hepatic Lipidosis) which can cause the mucous membranes and skin to turn yellow and can lead to death.

- Some cats are social eaters and prefer to be around people and interacted with while eating. Others prefer to eat at night or other times when no one is around. Try both options until you figure out what this cat prefers.
- Smell is VERY important to cats when they eat. If they have an upper respiratory tract infection (URI) food can be unappealing to them. Choose foods that smell stronger (seafood typically) and/or gently warm the food in the microwave to enhance smell. Keeping food fresh and not letting it sit out for more than a day or so helps as well. Also try to keep the nostrils free of nasal discharge which can block smell. Use of a nebulizer or steam from a shower can help open up the nasal passages as well.
- Cats tend to have a prey drive so tossing individual dry food kibbles or treats on the floor may stimulate the desire to seek out and investigate the food. Activity can stimulate appetite so any movement or play may help as well.
- Common reasons a cat may stop eating: Nausea from various causes, dental/oral pain, stress or fear due to being in a new environment, being offered foods they don't like or want, and upper respiratory infections.
- Less common food items to try if they won't eat regular cat food options:
 - Human baby food - pure meat varieties only, avoid any onions (toxic)
 - Lunch meat – ham, turkey, roast beef, chicken
 - Tuna fish or sardines
 - Canned shredded chicken or turkey – human grade
 - Tiki Cat, Fussie Cat or other shredded meat and/or seafood canned cat food

****It is important to note that most cats in a rescue or shelter environment may have never had high end food like grain free. They will likely prefer "junky" foods like Purina Cat Chow, Friskies, etc.

FEEDING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Initially measure out amount of food (canned and dry) when feeding to be able to tell what and how much the cat is eating. They may only eat a small amount at first so it is important to know if they ate and how much.

2. Weigh the cat every 1-2 days at the same time each day and record. Once the cat is eating some food and shows weight gain, then you can reduce weigh-ins to every 3-4 days or less.

3. Try offering different flavors or types of food. Some cats prefer dry over canned, fishy flavors over poultry, chunky in gravy vs pate'. Cats can be very specific about flavor, mouth feel, and shape of food.

- ☐ Don't put too much food out at a time since fresher food has more odor and flavor.
- ☐ Try warming canned food gently in microwave to increase the odor of the food, but make sure it's not hot to the touch.
- ☐ Don't put too many choices out at once since it overwhelms the cat, especially if they are nauseous, and may turn them off to all of the foods in front of them. Try one or two choices at a time.
- ☐ Softer foods like mousse or pate' textures may help if there is oral pain from ulcers (common with URI) or dental disease.

4. Make a list of some of the foods or treats the cat seems to be interested in so we can keep track for future reference. Include brand, flavor (at least poultry vs seafood), shape if dry, and texture if canned (chunks in gravy, shredded, pate').

For emergencies, please contact the Foster emergency number 734-717-4424

Non-emergent concerns, please email Fosters@hshv.org or call 734-661-3520

If you are unsure if it is an emergency then call or text the emergency number.