



Anorexia – what to do when your cat won't eat

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Body condition scoring

Anorexia is defined as a lack or loss of appetite and voluntary intake of food. In cats this can be due to a variety of reasons and usually treatment of the underlying disease is enough to help with return of appetite. However, some cats require nutritional support during treatment of the underlying disease until their appetite returns.

How can I entice my cat to eat?

There are several things that can be tried in order to try and get your pet to eat:

- Warming the food - you can try gently warming the food in the microwave to body temperature and offering this to your pet.
- Adding some water to the meal as this may increase acceptability.
- Offering smaller portions of the meal and removing the leftovers after 15 minutes if they show no interest in eating and offering again 2-3 hours later.
- Try feeding in a quiet environment, away from stress and noise.
- Try offering the food on a dinner plate.
- Try offering the food at the same time as when you sit down to eat.
- Try adding additional food items that are known to be palatable for your pet, such as boiled chicken breast, however these additional foods should make up no more than 10% of the daily caloric intake as if they do then they risk unbalancing the commercial cat food that is fed.

Your pet may have an underlying disease that requires a special diet for management or avoiding specific types of food are warranted, therefore we recommend speaking to your vet to make sure that your additional chosen foods are okay to feed.

- Ask your veterinarian to recommend a board-certified veterinary nutritionist who can help to formulate a complete and balanced home-cooked diet using ingredients that your pet finds palatable and are calorie dense.

Please note we do not recommend force feeding your pet either by hand or syringing into the mouth due to risk for aspiration and possible food aversion.

Is my pet eating enough?

The best way to ensure that your pet is receiving its daily calorie requirement is to weigh them regularly, for example every 2-3 days. This should be done on the same scale at the same time per day and preferably after walking, in order to ensure their bladder is empty. Another way to assess your pet is receiving the correct amount of daily calories is to assess their body condition score and muscle condition score, this can be done by downloading the following charts and using the criteria on these charts to assess your pet to make sure they are in the ideal range.

Cat Body Condition Score Chart:

<https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Body-Condition-Score-cat-updated-August-2020.pdf>

Cat Muscle Condition Score Chart:

<https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Muscle-Condition-Score-Chart-for-Cats.pdf>

When should I contact my veterinarian?

If your pet hasn't been eating well for at least 3 days then we would recommend contacting your veterinarian to discuss further options. In some cases your veterinarian may want to know if your pet stops eating for a day or two, as this may be concerning depending on the age of your pet, the body condition and the underlying disease. Therefore, we recommend asking your veterinarian at the time of diagnosis for the criteria you should use to contact them to let them know.

How will my veterinarian treat anorexia?

Treatment of your cat's underlying disease is usually enough to ensure return of appetite. However, in some cases it may take time for the treatment to be effective or for the pet's appetite to return and therefore additional measures may be needed. Depending on your pet's underlying condition, your veterinarian may recommend the use of oral/injectable appetite stimulants or the placement of a feeding tube. Your veterinarian can discuss the best options for you and your pet depending on your pet's underlying disease.

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