

Tasty Tidbits for Feline Stress Inappetence

Decreased appetite is common in cats during stressful times. However, it is particularly important to **make sure that they have not stopped eating altogether**. Cat's livers are not capable of effectively breaking down fats in the same way ours do. Cats (particularly large cats) can develop a life-threatening condition called Hepatic Lipidosis if they completely stop eating for 3-4 days. Because it can happen within a short time frame, here are some tips to encourage a fearful or stressed cat to eat.

Below are some tips that can set your feline friend up for success!

- ❖ **Help the cat feel more secure.** Eating is an inherently vulnerable activity. Often shy/fearful/anxious cats don't feel safe enough to eat. Sometimes just adding a hiding spot, giving the cat some pets or encouraging them to explore their space is enough to get them started. Make sure their bowl is left *inside* their hiding spot! Many cats will choose to go hungry rather than venture into potentially "dangerous territory."
- ❖ **Help the cat practice "normal" behavior.** Sometimes cats can be highly affected by an unfamiliar environment. With the more confident inappetent cats, try spending some time petting, grooming, talking to, playing, or just sitting with the cat *before* offering the food.
- ❖ **Pretend to "try" the food.** Take your hand and move the food around as a cat would while eating. You can even mimic cat "eating sounds" with your mouth. For some cats, this encourages them to explore, as well as helps to release the smell of the food, making it more tempting.
- ❖ **Is the bowl contributing?** Some cats have bowl preferences based on past experiences. You can try a different bowl, hand feeding, or putting the food directly on the ground in front of the cat. It's amazing how often this can do the trick! ***Note: Use care when hand feeding!** If it looks like the cat may accidentally bite (mistaking you for food) use a popsicle stick, pen, or spoon to offer the food.
- ❖ **Help them make contact with the food (only for more confident cats).** Take some of the food on your finger and offer it to the cat. When they sniff, gently touch the food to their nose. They will have to lick it off their nose, which can help pique their appetite. Similarly (if able to do safely), at the end of a session, you can take a small amount and swab it onto one of their paws. This will cause them to lick it off while grooming.
- ❖ **Come armed with multiple options.** You may try bringing small "samples" of various types of food. See what the cat may be interested in. If you hit on a success, provide a larger amount of that food. Many pet stores provide foods in sample sizes, and some stores like Pet Food Express have open-bag return policies.
- ❖ **Try heating the wet food up or adding water.** Sometimes warm food makes all the difference! Go easy—it only takes 5-8sec in the microwave. Test the food with a finger to make sure it isn't too hot.
- ❖ **Try just dry food.** You might be surprised how many cats prefer dry to wet! If dry food is in the same bowl as wet, they may ignore it, but chow down if offered only dry.
- ❖ **Look for "licking chops."** Though you may see the cats licking their lips while eating, there is often a distinct lick they will do once they are *finished eating*. You will see the tongue lick the whiskers as well as the lips, and the mouth will open wider than usual. While they *may* re-engage after this, it's less likely. Try coming back a bit later!

