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Fear-Free tip: How to pill a cat

Yep, you read that right. We're gonna help you put the treat in treatment in 7 (sort of) simple steps.



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FIRSTLINE

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Getting a pill down a cat is a feat of monumental proportions for many a cat guardian. Just the mention of giving medication to a cat can strike terror in the hearts of pet owners.

If you've ever struggled to pill to a cat, or have tried with little avail to instruct pet owners to do this at home with their cat try tips for putting the treat into treatment and getting a cat to more willingly take a pill. Note that every cat is different, and the method that works best for one cat may not for another kitty. Consider these ideas to get a cat to take a pill willingly:

1. First ensure the medication can be given with food. The type of treat the pill is hidden in is important. Try out different types of treats to find what works best for the cat.
2. Have precut portions of the treats ready when you're pilling so you can easily dole them out in fast order.

3. To build the excitement and hide the treat further, randomize the number of treats you give and the order of the pill to keep the clever kitty from learning the pilling order and turning her nose up at the treats.

4. Whichever hand you use to hide the pill inside the treat, use the other to seal the pill in the food so picky cats can find no trace of medication on the outside part of the food.

5. Keep the portion size small enough or soft enough so the cat doesn't chew, only licks and swallows. This prevents chewing up the pill that can be problematic with metabolism of certain medications. Chewing may also release a nasty taste when the outer coating is broken.

Use the 3-step approach

1. Give the promise—the treat without a pill.

2. Follow with the deed—pill hidden inside of a treat.

3. Immediately follow with the chaser—the treat without a pill.

Why it works: It's easier to give three treats this way. Giving only one treat to a cat can cause them to be more cautious, especially if they've found hidden pills in the past. The promise treat eliminates caution as it's tasty. And pill-free and following up the hidden pill with another treat gets the cat more excited in anticipating the next morsel, so they may eat faster with less hesitation with the one containing the pill.

6. Get the cat used to the pilling motion. Part of the fear factor of being pilled is the frightening situation of having their face held and head held back. But if the cat is used to this move and associates it with something pleasurable, it's not such a big deal.

> Teach the pet owner to handle around the cat's face and mouth to get the kitty used to touching around the face and mouth area. Find ways to reward the cat during this type of handling, such as soft treats.

> Follow up handling with something the cat enjoys, like their meal, petting or play. As the cat is comfortable, practice lifting up slightly on their mouth with the thumb and middle finger, forming a C shape above the cat's mouth. Immediately give a treat after or place a treat inside the cat's mouth that's extremely palatable to the cat, like a small morsel of lean turkey meat that's small enough it doesn't need chewed. The goal is for the pilling motion and action to be associated with positive results.

7. Teach cats to eat broth or canned cat food from a syringe or pill gun. You can place liquid or soft treat inside of the syringe or tiny pieces of treat placed inside of the pill gun. Start by smearing a soft treat on the outside of the syringe or pill gun for cats to lick off to accustom them to the object near their face.

Advanced tip: You can train the cat to tolerate something a little less exciting, such as a droplet of water from the syringe, if it's followed by a syringe with the actual treat.

It's important to have a cat comfortable taking liquid and swallowing the pill so the pill doesn't get stuck in the esophagus. Teaching a cat to take a small amount of flavored liquid, like tuna juice or soft food from syringe, spoon or bowl can help with proper digestion of the medication. (Find the [best treats to hide a pill inside here.](#))

It's important to help pet owners teach their cats to take treats early, preferably before you need to treat the cat, so when the kitty does need pilled, they are familiar and comfortable with the process. This means it's ideal to start out with the training early in life during kittenhood.

Just remember, even cats with previous negative associations can relearn the process. You can help them to relax and enjoy Fear-Free pilling if you break the training down into pieces cats are comfortable with. Just remember to build slowly with ample reinforcement to keep the experience positive.

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