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Pilling Your Pet

To heal, ill pets who are prescribed medication by their veterinarians really need to take those medications, even when the pet is resistant to taking pills. Compliance with your veterinarian's medication plan requires both filling the prescription and getting your pet to take it.

One big mistake is not finishing your pet's course of antibiotics. If you only finish half of the prescription, you have merely succeeded in killing off only the weakest of the bacteria, leaving the stronger bugs around to live. That's how stronger strains of bacteria are created, some of which are resistant to antibiotics.

Oral Capsules and Tablets

Most dogs are reasonably easy to give pills to because they'll take the pill when it's wrapped in food. Non-food-motivated dogs are a bit more difficult to pill, but they do eat. Even finicky dogs like to eat something. The trick is to find what works. It can be a frustrating process of trial and error, but eventually, you'll find a workable system, even if it doesn't involve food.

Some cat owners feel a sense of dread upon learning pills are necessary for their cat's health. Those sharp feline teeth are usually clamped shut tight, and many pet owners have difficulty finding an effective way to get pills in day after day. What works on Monday may not work on Tuesday. So, what to do if your dog or cat decides they won't take those pills? Some tried-and-true methods that help medications get where they need to be - inside your pet - include:

- ♥ Lunchmeat is the classic. Wrap the pill in low-fat deli meat such as turkey or chicken.
- ♥ Placing the pill in American cheese slices, hot dogs, bread, meatballs, or other soft food.
- ♥ Canned cheese, peanut butter, butter, or cream cheese might work wonders.
- ♥ Pill Pockets and similar products are soft little edible pouches intended to be wrapped around a pill to hide the smell and taste and encourage pets to take their medicine.
- ♥ Your veterinarian can order medications from a compounding pharmacy, which can place the medication into a liquid or transdermal ointment. Compounded medications are not always as effective, cost more, and take a few days to arrive. But often, are the best option for difficult patients.
- ♥ Please ask us about a different form of medication -tablet instead of liquid or vice versa if you know what’s easiest for you and your pet.

- ♥ Give an “empty” treat first, then quickly the “loaded” treat, then follow with another “empty” treat.
- ♥ Alternate treat types. For example: Give a piece of “empty” cheese, then a piece of “loaded” bread, then a little peanut butter. Switch it up each time.
- ♥ A “piller” is a device that has a rubber end that holds the pill and a plunger to deliver the pill to the back of the throat. Place a little soft food on the end of the piller.
- ♥ Wrapping your cat gently in a towel can help you administer oral medications to prevent pawing, scratching, and wiggling away.
- ♥ Give dramatic praise when the pet takes the medication.
- ♥ Pair a walk, massage, toy with giving medications to create a good experience and positive association.

Make sure any peanut butter you use is not "sugar free" or "low-sugar" peanut butter, which may contain the artificial sweetener xylitol**. Xylitol can cause severe toxicity.**

Ask your veterinarian to have someone show you how to pill your pet while you’re still at the appointment during which the medication is prescribed. When you get home is no time to realize that you have to push that bitter little pill past all those teeth. If all else fails, there’s YouTube. There are many good videos on how to pill pets, and seeing it done may give you the confidence to do it yourself.

If you are going to skip the let's-pretend-it's-a-treat strategies, or they aren’t working well enough, here are a few tips on that, too:

For cats, gently push the cheeks against the molars as this will encourage them to keep their mouth open in order not to bite themselves (sneaky, but effective). Drop or place the pill as far back on their tongue as you can get it. As mentioned above, there is a balance spot on the back of the tongue where swallowing becomes almost a reflex, and spitting the pill out is less likely to happen.

Next, gently hold the pet's mouth closed and give a puff of air into the nose. This sounds silly, but it works. (Caution: Some pets won't like this and may bite your face. Some animals really do not like it.) When they lick their nose, the pill has gone down.

Oral Liquid Medications

Giving liquid oral medications can be a bit tricky for picky pets, those that don’t like their face handled, and those that must take medications that are bitter.

If you are lucky, your pet may be prescribed something they like the taste of (as mentioned before, compounding pharmacies can offer some flavored medications), and they may take the medication via syringe quite easily. If not, using your dog or cat's canine teeth (if your pet has them) and administering medication through the side of your pet's mouth can be super helpful when medicating using a syringe.

- ♥ Draw up the medication first before getting your dog or cat ready to medicate. If there are many bubbles in the syringe, it can slightly alter the dose you are giving. After you pull up the appropriate amount of medication, draw a bit of air into the syringe. Flick the syringe with your finger, tapping out any excess bubbles. You can then push the medication just to the tip of the syringe, removing the bubbles.
- ♥ If you have a small dog or cat, you may want to place a towel or rug on a table or countertop and have them sit in front of you, facing to the side with their back more towards you. If you have a medium to large dog, have them sit on the floor, preferably on a rug or carpeted area, so they do not slip.
- ♥ You will want to have the syringe in your dominant hand and your other hand ready to handle your pet's mouth.
- ♥ Gently lift up your pet's lip (on the side of their mouth) to expose the teeth. Look for the large canine teeth (if present) or, if they are missing some teeth, toward the back of the mouth.
- ♥ Wedge the syringe gently into the mouth, pointing toward the back of the tongue, not deep into the throat, and press the plunger down on the syringe to administer the medication, and close your pet's mouth, giving a chance for them to swallow. If there is a larger amount of liquid to administer (more than 3mL), give it in several portions to prevent choking/aspirating.
- ♥ It is ok to give a portion of the medication in 10-15 seconds, take a break, and then finish out the dose over a few minutes if your pet has any swallowing issues or gets upset by being medicated.

Always follow your veterinarian's instructions and what is indicated on the medication label. This may mean you have to refrigerate the medication, shake well before giving it, etc. If you are unsure of how much medication to draw up, check with your veterinarian first.

In Summary

No matter what type of medication you are giving, always remember to check the label each time you administer medications to ensure you have the:

Correct drug (If you have a pet on multiple medications, it can be stressful at times and confusing. Take your time and check labels each time.)

Correct dose (Do you need to split pills or are they already split for you? Do you know how to read and draw up a syringe correctly?)

Correct route (If it is a liquid, is it swallowed, or should it be given translingually/transbuccally)?

Correct time and frequency (check how often it should be administered and pay attention to how it should be administered: does this medication need to be given on an empty stomach, with food, at a specific time of day, etc.).

Please let us know right away if you are unable to medicate your pet!