



Gentle Vet

Animal Hospital

Pilling Your Cat

Hiding Pills in Food or a Treat

This doesn't work for all pills, or for all cats for that matter. For this to work, the pill cannot have a strong odor or bitter taste, and the food or treat must be something that your cat likes so much that they will eat it even when it is 'tainted' by a pill. For this, you can use any cat food or a people food your cat likes that will not make them sick. The people foods you need to avoid include garlic or onions (these are toxic to cats), chocolate, or anything with lactose in it since most cats are lactose intolerant. Meat-only baby food is a good choice. This is the "a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down" philosophy.

The easiest way to hide a pill in a treat is to purchase a "Pill Pocket" or similar product. This is a soft treat with a hole in the center. You place the pill inside the treat, pinch it closed over the pill, and pretend that you are just giving a normal treat to your cat. If your cat is a big treat eater, and they don't tend to chew their treats, this will work very well. You can also try this using a small piece of cheese, lunch meat, lean hamburger, or anything small that you can hide a pill inside of and that your cat will be likely to inhale without chewing. Using pate canned food meatballs also works.

If the above options do not work for your cat, then the next thing is to grind the pill up into a fine powder using a mortar and pestle, two spoons, a hammer, a pill grinder, or anything that will achieve the desired result. You can then mix the pill powder in a small amount of a very tasty cat or human food that your cat normally goes crazy over. Just make sure that your cat eats all of the food, or they won't get all of their medicine, so don't use a large amount of food. Also keep in mind that some medications do not taste very well and some cats have the ability to smell it in their food, causing them to avoid eating whatever food the medication was placed in.

Note: Some medications cannot be crushed, such as extended release tablets. Check with your veterinarian before crushing a tablet.

Pilling By Hand

Okay, so your cat is too smart for the pill in a treat method, or the pill is just too bad tasting (such as with Cerenia or metronidazole - very bitter tasting meds). The next option is giving the pill by hand. There are a lot of cats that will tolerate this well. You can either give the pill as is, or you can lubricate it with a little butter.





If your cat is fairly docile, then you may be able to administer the pill by yourself with no help. There are three ways to hold your cat by yourself to give the pill.

1. The first method involves holding the top of your cat's head by placing your thumb on one side of the upper jaw and your fingers on the other side. Tilt your cat's head back gently until their nose points toward the ceiling, which should cause your cat's jaw to open slightly.
2. The second method involves scruffing your cat and tipping their head back until the nose points toward the ceiling. This is for slightly less cooperative cats.
3. The third method is only for cats that like to be held on their back. This involves cradling them on their back like a baby, but with their head and neck in an upright position, and just using your hand to open up their mouth.

Once you have found a method of restraint that works for your cat, the next step is to use your ring finger of your dominate hand to open your cat's mouth further. Then, using your thumb and forefinger, place the pill as far back in your cat's mouth as possible. Quickly close your cat's mouth, but do not hold it tightly close. Cats need to be able to lick their nose to swallow comfortably. You can encourage swallowing by gently rubbing your cat's throat or have a syringe of water ready to go, and dribbling it into the side of your cat's mouth immediately after placing the pill. If the pill was placed far enough into the back of the mouth then your cat will not be able to spit it out.



The goal is to place the pill just past the groove in the back of the tongue. If you are successful, your cat will promptly swallow the pill.

Pill Poppers

So, neither treats nor hand pilling will work for your cat? Don't give up yet. This is what they invented pill poppers for. Pill poppers look like a long fat syringe that you can place a pill inside of. You then use the pill popper to get the pill into the back of your cat's throat without having to risk getting bitten and this may be less offensive to your cat than putting your fingers in his/her mouth. Pill poppers can be easier for you to maneuver and quicker to pill with than just your fingers.



Examples of a pill gun or pill popper

For this method, you may also be able to pill your cat by yourself, but about the only effective methods of restraint are holding the top of your cat's head or scruffing your cat. When it comes to restraining your cat's head, you want to place your non-dominant hand around the top of their head and have your thumb and index finger behind their eyes and cheek bones as shown in the pictures below.



Once you have control of your cat's head, tip the head back, as this will help open the mouth. Using your dominant hand, take the pill popper with the pill already placed in it, and use it to further open your cat's mouth by gently pushing it into the side of his/her mouth, just behind the canines where there is an area with no teeth (as demonstrated in the picture below). Once in, quickly but gently push the pill popper to the back of your cat's mouth, push the pill in with the plunger, and then repeat the methods to stimulate swallowing if needed.



A few additional pointers

Some cats may require two people to restrain. The second holder is most effective if they can hold your cat's two front legs to keep them from batting at you, and their arms along your cat's body to further help immobilize them. A towel wrapped securely around your cat may also help. If your cat has their front nails, consider trimming them before you start.

Speed is of the essence. The faster you go, the less your cat will fight you. You may want to practice on a different cat in the home, using a treat, before you pill your cat.

Some pills, especially Doxycycline, can sit in the esophagus and cause irritation. It is recommended to follow the pill with a treat or the remainder of a meal. A small amount of meat-only baby food, Kong or Squeeze cheese, or low sodium chicken broth can be a good choice for a treat after pilling. This will also create a positive experience for your cat and help ensure they swallow the pill.

Resources

AllFelineHospital.com

SmithKline Beecham Animal Health