

3 Ways to Give Your Cat a Pill Without Being 'Eaten Alive'

Do you dread giving your kitty pills? You're definitely not alone ... But it doesn't have to be a scarring experience for either you or Fluffy. Here are three step-by-step ways to help her swallow the pill, minus any claw and teeth marks. And leaving you smiling ...

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Giving medication in pill form is a chore most cat owners dread
- The best way to pill a cat is to prepare him well in advance for when the time comes. This involves getting him accustomed to having his face and mouth handled, as well as the motions involved in pilling (e.g., holding his head back while gently opening his mouth)
- If your kitty's medication or supplement can be given with food, the best approach is to "treat" her to a pill hidden in a delicious snack

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published August 31, 2015.

If you're like the majority of people owned by a cat, pilling little Fluffy – otherwise known as trying to place a tiny, hard object into the mouth of an unwilling creature with sharp claws and teeth – is not something you look forward to.

If you've never had to do it, you're probably thinking it's not a big deal. In fact, it's the people who've attempted this feat in the past that recoil in fear when their kitty's veterinarian hands them a bottle of pills or a dietary supplement in pill form.

Fortunately, there are a few different techniques for pilling a cat, because every cat is a little different, and what works for one may not work for another.

Note: the following method works only for medications or supplements that can be given with food.

Pilling Advance Prep

The first steps in giving your kitty a pill or supplement should be taken long before she actually needs that pill or supplement. The goal is to help your cat learn to tolerate the handling that will be necessary to pill her, and also to take liquids and solids from a syringe or pill gun.

First get your cat used to being gently handled around her face and mouth, using treats to reward her for allowing the handling and to associate the activity with something pleasant. Make the initial face-and-mouth handling sessions short, and follow up with a meal, petting or playtime.

As your kitty gets more comfortable with having her face touched, you can begin using your thumb and middle finger to gently lift up slightly on her mouth, forming a C shape with your fingers. Place a special treat like a small morsel of meat that doesn't need to be chewed into her mouth or immediately upon letting go.

The objective is to get her accustomed to the pilling motion and associate it with something positive.

Pilling in 5 Steps

Now that you've been fake-pilling your kitty for awhile, the day may come when you need to do it for real:

1. Pick your cat's favorite treat (you may need to try out a few different kinds to learn which one works best).
2. Treat portion sizes must be small enough and soft enough so that your cat doesn't chew, only licks and swallows. Chewing the pill can release a nasty taste into the treat; in addition, many medications must be swallowed whole to be metabolized properly.
3. Have several treats ready before you begin, so that you can offer them in rapid succession once the fun begins.
4. Hide the pill in one treat, and use your other hand to seal the pill in (so kitty won't smell medication on the outside of the treat).
5. Give a pill-free treat, followed by the treat with the pill, followed by another pill-free treat.

Since cats are extremely clever, it's a good idea to vary the number of treats you give at each pilling session, as well as the order in which you give the treat holding the pill, so kitty doesn't learn to predict which treat holds the pill.

Don't Overlook the Benefits of Syringe- and Pill Gun-Training

It's also a great idea to teach your cat early on to take things from a syringe or pill gun.

Start by rubbing a soft treat or some moist food on the outside of the device and letting her lick it clean. This will get her used to the feel of the thing in or near her mouth.

Next, place some moist food or tiny pieces of treat inside the device and gently push them into her mouth in very small amounts.

Once she's reasonably comfortable taking solids from the device, switch to a few drops of water in the syringe (which she probably won't enjoy) followed immediately by a syringe with a treat.

The goal is to get kitty comfortable taking liquid and swallowing the pill so the pill doesn't get stuck in her esophagus. If she'll take a small amount of broth, tuna juice, or soft food immediately after her pill, it can also help with proper digestion of the medication.

Warning regarding syringe dosing of liquid medication: A quite common cause of aspiration pneumonia is faulty administration of liquid medication either administered by drench (drench is when a stomach tube is passed down the back of the throat), or by a dose syringe. Any liquid that's given via syringe, whether medication or food, must not be given any faster than the animal can swallow, or the risk of aspiration pneumonia becomes very real.

What If My Cat's Pills Can't Be Given With Food?

Ideally, your veterinarian can prescribe medication or supplements that can be given with food, because "treating" kitty at pill time as described above is the easiest and best way to keep her stress level down.

However, if the medication has to be given away from food, I recommend you practice the steps below a few times in your mind prior to actually engaging your kitty; the more efficient you are with your cat, the smoother the process will go.

(These instructions are for right-handed people. If you're left-handed, you'll need to adjust them accordingly.)

1. Place kitty on a sturdy, flat surface like a tabletop. Your cat will naturally try to back away from the pill, so you want to rest your right arm on the table and tuck him into the crook of your right elbow.

Trying to approach your cat from the front will have him backing away and escaping from you and the pill. That's why your body should be behind the cat, with both of you facing the same direction.

2. Hold the pill in your left hand.
3. With your right hand, place your right thumb on one side of your cat's face on the cheek and your index finger on the other cheek and gently lift his nose toward the ceiling. This will make his mouth drop open a bit.
4. Now use a finger of your left hand to open his lower jaw wider. This position prevents him from being able to bite because he can't control his lower jaw.
5. Place the pill as far back as possible into his mouth, then let go of his face, but keep him tucked into your elbow. If he licks his lips, it's an indication the pill has gone down.

Please note: It's futile, not to mention dangerous, to try to give your cat a pill with his head in a natural position. You will likely be bitten, which is why you must position his head vertically.

6. Many cats actually pretend they've swallowed the pill when they haven't. As soon as they get free, out pops the pill and the joke's on you.

So don't let kitty go before checking his mouth for the pill. Cats figure out pretty quickly we're waiting for licking motions and many clever felines have been known to make the licking motion with the pill still in their mouth.

7. If you can still see the pill in there, re-open your cat's mouth as described above, reach a finger in and move the pill further back on the tongue if possible. If that doesn't work, let kitty spit the pill out and start over.
8. If possible, you can try to squirt a small amount of water into your cat's mouth (see discussion above about teaching your cat to accept a syringe) to encourage him to swallow. This helps float the pill off the tongue and sends it on its way down to the stomach.

Sources and References

[dvm360 May 1, 2015](#)
