

ENCOURAGING YOUR CAT TO TAKE IN MORE FLUIDS



When might it be helpful to encourage a cat to take in more fluids?

Cats with kidney disease

These cats are a greater risk of dehydration as their failing kidney function means they are unable to retain their water intake – much of it being lost in the more frequent and large urinations that we typically see in these cats.

Cats with lower urinary tract disease (feline idiopathic cystitis or FIC)

Producing larger volumes of more dilute urine helps to reduce bladder irritation and encourages regular urination which helps to flush the bladder out. Studies have proven that increasing water intake helps prevent relapses of this condition.

Older cats

Old age metabolic and brain changes can mean cats spend more time sleeping. Stiffness or pain associated with arthritis can mean that they are more reluctant to get up and seek water regularly enough.

Stressed cats or those in busy or multi-cat households

Physical or mental barriers may limit access to the water bowl and this inhibits normal drinking behaviour.



MY TEN TOP TIPS TO INCREASE FLUID INTAKE

1: TYPE OF BOWL - Choose a bowl that suits your cats drinking preference!

- Experiment with the type of bowls that you offer your cat
- Cats generally prefer **glass, metal and ceramic dishes** to plastic ones (think about the last time you drank from water that had been sitting in a plastic vessel – chemical tastes can leach out of some plastics into the water)
- Most cats prefer a **wide, shallow bowl** so that they do not need to put their head inside the container to drink from it. Cats do not usually like their whiskers to touch the side of their water (or food for that matter) bowl.
- Some cats like drinking from **glass tumblers** (choose a non-breakable one if placing on a high surface)
- Fill the water bowl to the brim and keep it topped up – cats like to drink from a **full container** with a visible meniscus.
- Avoid double bowls – you cat will drink more if food and water are offered in separate bowls (and as you will see below in separate locations).

2: NUMBER OF WATER BOWLS: Multiple water bowls are best for any cat

- Always ensure one water bowl on each level of the home so that they do not need to go up or down stairs to find their water.
- If you have more than one cat you need to provide enough resources for each “social group” of cats – at least one bowl of water per social group of cats in the home.
- Like humans, some cats get on better with each other than others. By being in the same social group, what I mean is those cats that are happy to rub against each other, curl up together and groom each other. If cats in the same house do not show this behaviour then they are likely to be in a different social group. Each social group needs its own food, water, litter, rest facilities and entry/exit points into their territory (ie it should not be possible for any cat in the home to prevent access to any of these things by another cat).

3: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION : Water bowl location is everything, so choose wisely.

- Avoid water bowls near to the food bowl or litter tray – cats prefer not to drink near their feeding or toileting stations.
- Choose a quiet location - away from doors that are heavily use or especially busy places, noisy washing machines. Think like a cat – if the feline neighbourhood bully likes to glare at your cats through the glass patio doors then this would be a rather vulnerable location and would be a poor choice of location for encouraging use of any key resource (food, water, bed, toileting area etc).

4: ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLIES – Consider running water sources as some cats like to drink from moving water

- Water fountains are on option (there is a ceramic one that I use for my cats... made by Pioneer Pets www.pioneerpet.com/fountains/ceramic/)
- Other options:
 - A dripping tap
 - A shower tray or bath with a small amount of water in it.
 - Placing a ping pong ball inside a larger diameter bowl full of water – some cats enjoy playing with this and it can stimulate drinking as well as helping to create some movement of the water which many cats like.



5: DIFFERENT TYPES OF WATER

- Consider experimenting with different types of water to see if your cat has a preference . Many cats do not like heavily fluorinated water, so why not try:
- Rainwater – collected in clean containers in your garden. You may notice many cats prefer to drink from puddles and other sources of water in the garden given a choice
- Bottle mineral water

6: OTHER TASTY LIQUIDS – This can be a tasty way to up your cat's fluid intake

- Water left over from poaching some chicken or fish
- Prawns/fish or meat liquidized in water to create a soup or broth
- Spring water liquid from a can of tuna (avoid brine as this is a highly salty water which is not good for any cat, particularly an older cat or one with kidney disease)
- Liquid from a bag of frozen prawns that have defrosted
- Once you discover which one seems to be popular with your cat, consider freezing portions in an ice cube tray. For some cats adding a cube of flavoured water to their normal water bowl is enough to encourage drinking.

NB: Be careful!

- Take care to allow hot liquids to cool down to body temperature
- Avoid any sauces and stocks that contain onions/garlic or powdered forms of these as they are poisonous to cats
- Avoid giving too much protein (eg meat) or salt to a cat with kidney disease – if unsure please discuss with me first.
- Avoid milk as not only can it not be fully digested by cats and lead to diarrhoea, but it is high in phosphate which is not ideal for cats with kidney disease.

7: TEMPERATURE

Offer water at room temperature as the flavour is reduced in cold liquids

8: DIET

Wet food (canned/pouches) is better than a dry diet!

Always check with me before changing your cat's diet

9: ADDING EXTRA WATER TO FOOD CAN ALSO HELP INCREASE WATER INTAKE

- If possible, ideally add water to wet food but if your cat will only eat dry food (biscuits) then you can still try adding water to their food as some cats will eat it. With dry foods, add the water and leave for a short period to allow the biscuits to swell before offering to your cat.
- Whether it's wet or dry food, always start by adding a small quantity of water (eg one teaspoonful) and gradually increase this over a period of several days if your cat is happy to eat their watered down food – after all we don't want to increase water intake at the expense of appetite! That said, some cats will happily eat a food that resembles soup!
- Always add water at room temperature rather than cold water if possible.

10: PERSISTENCE IS THE KEY

- Be gradual in making changes – cats are creatures of habit and do not like sudden changes, let alone in such vital resources as food/water.

Whatever you can do will make some difference and your cat would thank you if they could >^..^<