

CAT 11

Caring for your sick cat



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PETS
CROSS

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homeless pets since 1897.



Caring for your sick cat

Sick cats should be kept indoors with a litter tray – if they are allowed to roam free they may not come back! Never give your cat your own medications – many are poisonous to cats. If your pet is ill, always consult your vet. The following information is intended only to assist you in caring for an animal that is undergoing veterinary treatment.

Vomiting and diarrhoea

In young or elderly cats the risk of dehydration is greater and tummy upsets can be very dangerous. Consult a vet as soon as possible. Any pet that has been vomiting for more than 24 hours should see a vet.

If vomiting is not severe or frequent, you can try not feeding your cat for 12 hours, although still allow access to water. Do not feed the cat until at least 12 hours after vomiting has stopped. Then offer a teaspoonful of boiled skinned chicken or white fish, such as cod or coley. If this is tolerated, give a little more after two hours. Keep this diet going for a couple of days, then gradually mix with normal food.

For pets with diarrhoea, withhold food for 12 hours, then feed as outlined above. Consult your vet if diarrhoea persists for more than two days or if your pet seems dull or weak and does not want to eat.

Cat flu

Cat flu is a viral disease with symptoms similar to that of a bad cold – see the pet care leaflet, Cat flu (C18). It is usually most dangerous in kittens, but you should still take your pet to the vet.

Cats with the virus may get mouth ulcers which make swallowing difficult. Ulcers can form on the eyes as well, so if the eye is closed up or there is a lot of discharge, see a vet. Also, the smell

of food stimulates appetite, therefore a cat with a bunged-up nose may not want to eat. Wipe any discharge from the nose or eyes with warm salt water (a teaspoon of salt in a pint of water). Many decongestants are toxic to cats but Olbas Oil is safe – given either in a vaporiser or as a couple of drops on bedding. Avoid direct contact with the skin as it can be an irritant.

Skin problems

Bathe sore or itchy patches in cool salt water (a teaspoon of salt in a pint of water) or apply an ice pack. Prevent licking by using an Elizabethan collar – continual licking does not heal but does increase soreness. Put socks on the hindlegs/paws and secure with tape to prevent scratching. Consider flea treatment – the most effective treatments are available from your vet.

Bite-wounds from fighting may turn septic and discharge an unpleasant smelling pus. They are not usually life threatening but do need antibiotic treatment.



Tempting a sick cat to eat

Not eating may indicate emotional upset or disturbance – but if it lasts more than 24 hours you are advised to see a vet.

Invalids often do not wish to eat. To tempt them, warm their food to release aroma, and try strong smelling items such as pilchards (in small quantities so they do not cause digestive upsets). Do not leave uneaten food down – it may cause your cat to feel nauseous. Many cats enjoy chicken, cat biscuits, tuna, or invalid diets from the vet. Liquidise food if there is any difficulty swallowing. Offer bits of food by hand, or dab a tiny bit onto the lips or front paws. Stroking or grooming a cat may encourage eating.

General nursing

Many elderly cats develop long-standing conditions that, at times, need home nursing. Monitor your cat carefully and, if the bad times are beginning to outweigh the good, consider the options carefully. Discuss the options with your vet – see the pet care leaflet, Time to say goodbye (C5).

Alternatively, contact our Pet Bereavement Support Service. Always notify the vet of any changes in the condition of a pet with a long-standing illness.

Check that you have enough medication to see you through the weekend. Follow the vet's instructions carefully. Phone the vet if your pet's condition is deteriorating.

Provide a warm thick bed in a quiet place. If you provide a heater pad or a hot water bottle it must be well padded – they can cause burns. Check the patient regularly throughout the day – if they are not able to move, then they should be turned every two hours. If using a heat pad, check more frequently for overheating. Check for soiling with urine or faeces. If soiled, wash your pet with a baby shampoo and then dry them. Beware of burning when using hair dryers. Select the lowest setting and hold the appliance at a distance. If your pet is unable to move for more than 24 hours, discuss with your vet the long-term outlook and the quality of life your pet can expect.

Sick cats should be groomed daily – this helps to cheer them up! Easy access to water is important, especially as cats are prone to kidney problems. Place several bowls in different rooms. Cats prefer water to be situated away from their feeding places, in a dog size bowl which is kept filled practically to the brim.



Giving medication to your cat

Tablets

Sometimes you can give medication in food – but check with your vet in case it is essential to give it on an empty tummy.

- Choose a strong-tasting food-stuff that will either stick to a tablet (so that it does not fall out the mouth) or mix a crushed tablet into this food – pilchards, cheese or sausage are all ideal
- Offer the medicated food when your pet is hungry, and keep the quantity small, so that it all gets eaten
- Tasty soft treats are also available – ask your vet or pet shop
- If this does not work, you will have to administer the medicine by hand

Always tell your vet if you are having trouble giving tablets. Many tablets now come in nice-tasting palatable forms. There is also an antibiotic injection lasting 14 days which, although costly, may be worth it in terms of stress reduction (although it may not be suitable for use in all cases).

When medicating your pet, preparation is vital. Get everything ready without your cat seeing, so that your pet does not hide. Remove the top from



drops or ointments, or remove a tablet from the container. Confine your pet to one room, so that you do not have to chase your cat round the house, and then pick the animal up. It is helpful either to wrap your cat in a towel or blanket or to have a second person to hold the forelegs.

How to administer tablets

Position your left hand (if you are right-handed) on top of the cat's head with your thumb on one side and your fingers on the other side of the cat's cheeks.





Tilt the head back so that the nose points at the ceiling. The mouth should then open.

Hold the tablet between the thumb and index finger of your other hand. Use the other fingers of this hand to press on the front of the lower jaw between the canine teeth to open the mouth further. Pop the pill onto the tongue as far back as you can get it.

Close the mouth and hold it closed until you have seen the cat swallow. Stroke the throat or rub the nose to try to stimulate swallowing. If in doubt, open the mouth and look. You can then either give a small quantity of water to wash the tablet down – ask your vet for a small syringe, and give it slowly so your pet doesn't choke or offer a tasty morsel – which will also help take away the memory of the experience.

It may help to coat the tablet with butter or margarine to make swallowing easier. You can also buy pill poppers or guns (long thin tubes with a plunger),

which you insert into the mouth, pushing the plunger to administer the pill.

Liquid medicines

- Draw up the medicine into a dropper or syringe
- Tilt the head back as described above
- Insert the syringe or dropper into the side of the mouth behind the canines (the big fangs)
- Administer the liquid slowly, allowing your pet time to swallow. Be prepared for some of the medicine to dribble out or for your pet to struggle and “froth” at the mouth. A second person can help by holding paper towels below the jaw.
- Give something to take the taste away afterwards

Eye drops and ointments

Bathe any discharge from the eye. If you are right-handed, use the index finger and thumb of your left hand to



hold the eyelids open. Animals have strong eyelid muscles so you will need to be firm.

- Hold the medication in your right hand, and bring it towards the eye from the side
- If you are administering drops, put one drop right into the eye, being careful not to touch the eye itself
- With an ointment, squeeze a little out of the nozzle to start with, position over the eye, and squeeze again to lay a trail of ointment over the actual surface of the eye. Be careful not to touch the eye with the nozzle.
- Do not let your pet rub the eye – but do give a treat!



Ear medication

The earflap is only part of your cat's ear. The hearing apparatus is inside the head, at the end of an L-shaped tube (the ear canal), which connects it to the outside. This tube starts at the base of the flap where it attaches to the head, runs vertically down the side of the head, and then turns sharply inwards.

When cleaning the ears or applying medication:

- hold the earflap with your left hand if you are right-handed and look for the ear opening
- hold the bottle in your right hand and squeeze in the correct number of drops
- keep hold of the earflap, feel for the tube running down the side of the head and use the finger and thumb of your right hand to gently massage the medication down the tube. Wipe away any excess but do not use cotton buds inside the ear.
- release the earflap – your pet will shake their head!
- give a reward

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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