



# **WAYS TO HELP INCREASE YOUR CAT'S WATER INTAKE**

**2015 Edition**

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An important aspect of the management of lower urinary tract disease in cats is urine dilution. Since the kidneys of a healthy adult cat have a tremendous ability to concentrate urine, getting your cat to drink enough water to achieve urine dilution can be challenging. Below are some suggestions on how to increase a cat's water intake.

## FOOD CHOICE

### Canned formulas

- Canned formulas contain significantly more water than dry formulas. They are generally composed of approximately 75% water compared to dry formulas which typically have less than 10% moisture. Feeding a diet composed of entirely canned food is one of the best ways to increase your cat's total fluid intake and help dilute his urine even if he appears to drink less water on his own.
- Since taste and consistency preferences are established early in life, canned food should ideally be offered to kittens at weaning. It may be difficult to make an adult cat adapt to canned food later in life if he was not exposed to it as a kitten. It is not an impossible task though, so ask your veterinary team for tips on how to gradually introduce canned food to your adult cat.

### Formulas increased in sodium

- A diet formulated with increased sodium levels when compared to other maintenance diets may be prescribed by your veterinarian to help increase your cat's voluntary water intake and increase his urine production (Hawthorne 2004). Diets such as **Royal Canin Urinary SO** and **Royal Canin Urinary SO Moderate Calorie** offer an increased sodium level which is safe for your cat and that will help dilute your cat's urine.

## ADDING WATER TO THE FOOD

### Adding water to canned food

- Adding additional water to your cat's canned food is an easy way to further increase your cat's water intake. This is particularly important to promote urine dilution if your cat eats both dry and canned food as it helps to compensate for the lower level of moisture that your cat receives from his dry food.

### Adding water to dry food

- Some cats don't accept canned food readily but surprisingly enough will accept having water added to their dry food. A lot of water may be required to induce urine dilution (Buckley 2011). As a general rule, to achieve significant urine dilution in most cats yet keep the math easy, we suggest to aim for a water to dry food ratio of 1:1 on a weight basis. For example: 10 milliliters of water for 10 grams of dry food. This ratio should work for most cats but your veterinarian can measure your cat's urine concentration and help you adjust, if needed, the amount of water added to achieve sufficient urine dilution.

Initially offer a choice of both the dry formula alone and the dry formula to which you added water. This will help avoid stressing your cat by giving him time to get used to the soaked food. Slowly increase the amount of water added to the food as your cat accepts the soaked dry formula and once he is eating it readily, remove the non-soaked dry food.

## FEEDING SCHEDULE

- Feeding multiple small meals/day instead of one large meal/day is another way to encourage your cat to drink more water. A study showed that the voluntary water intake of cats significantly increased when their daily intake went from one meal/ day to the same total calories but divided in 2 or 3 meals/day (Kirschvink 2005).
- It is important to provide easy access to fresh water at all times. Cats are nocturnal and some may prefer to drink in the evening.

## WATER BOWLS

- Make sure the bowls are clean and away from the litter box area.
- Some cats prefer not to share their bowl (especially with dogs). We recommend using the 1+1 rule (one bowl per cat in the household plus one, placed in different locations so that one cat can't prevent other cats from accessing all the water bowls).
- Some cats may have a preference when it comes to the size, depth or type of bowl. It is recommended to experiment and offer water in different types of bowls/containers (e.g., large dog bowl, smaller cat bowl, a glass or mug, a plant saucer offering a wide surface area, bowls made of stainless steel, glass and/or ceramic) to determine if your cat has preferences. You may also try leaving clean water in the bottom of a sink or bathtub.
- Some cats will prefer bowls filled right to the top presumably so that their whiskers don't touch the sides of the bowl when they drink, others will prefer reaching down in a container for their water.
- A variety of water types (e.g., filtered, bottled, distilled, tap or rain water) as well as temperatures (e.g., room temperature, cool, cold) can be offered.
- Adding broth and tuna/fish juice has been recommended by some to flavor the water and encourage water intake. We recommend trying the other measures in this document before considering this option. Please also discuss the risks and benefits with your veterinarian before using this measure.

## RUNNING WATER

- Some cats prefer a source of running water and will drink slightly more out of a pet fountain. They can be purchased at pet stores, at some veterinary clinics and online. So far there is a lack of data supporting that water fountains will cause a significant enough increase in water intake to cause urine dilution in cats (Grant 2009) but adding one may still be worth trying in some cats along with other measures.  
Make sure that there is also a water bowl available away from the fountain especially while the cat gets used to the fountain as some cats are scared of them.
- An alternative to the water fountain would be to leave a shallow bowl under a slowly dripping tap.

## REFERENCES

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