

My veterinarian suggested I start feeding my 6 year old cat canned food instead of dry since he had to be treated last week for a urinary problem. I have tried putting out a few different kinds of canned food and he doesn't want them, he only wants to eat his dry kibble.

I agree that feeding canned food is an important step in preventing future urinary issues. Our pet cats descended from desert animals and can survive on very little water by concentrating their urine. If a pet cat doesn't drink much water and eats only dry food, the concentrated urine can form sludge that blocks the urethra, especially in male cats. While some cats love canned food, others are "addicted" to dry food and the transition to canned takes time and patience. It may take months to get a stubborn cat switched over. Cats are attracted by the taste of the animal digest coating that pet food companies spray on the outside of the kibble during processing. Research also shows that cats like the feel of pointy textured kibble when they are chewing.

Start by not leaving dry food out all day. Set up mealtimes, generally 2 meals a day is fine. If your cat was used to free-feeding, you may have to learn to ignore pitiful meowing in between meals. Try to begin by mixing a spoonful of canned food in with the dry and pick up any uneaten food after 30 minutes. If he seems to accept the canned food, gradually add more and more every few days until he is eating 100% canned diet. Do not try feeding only the canned in the hope that if he is hungry enough he'll eat it. Cats, especially obese ones, can develop a potentially fatal condition of the liver known as hepatic lipidosis if they go too long without eating. It is helpful to have a baby scale to weigh your cat while transitioning him to canned food. He may lose weight at first, but should not lose it too fast. A loss of more than 2% a week (3 ounces for a 10 lb cat) is not healthy.

For cats that won't touch any of the canned foods you try, there are some tricks you can try. Warm up the canned food to body temperature. Add a little canned tuna or salmon or just the juice from the can to the canned/dry mixture. You can sprinkle parmesan cheese on his food or add small pieces of chicken or beef. Sometimes chicken, lamb or turkey varieties of baby food are appealing to cats and can be smeared on the canned food. Try petting your cat when he is eating, or offering the canned food by hand. Ask your veterinarian about sprinkling a very tasty probiotic powder on the food. Above all be patient and persistent and you will succeed. There are very few cats who will never believe that anything but kibble is actually food.

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