

I have a cat that hardly ever drinks water and I want to give her milk to get her to drink something. Is it a bad idea?

The first reason not to give a cat milk to drink is due to the common digestive problem known as lactose intolerance. After weaning, most cats no longer produce lactase, the enzyme needed to digest lactose (milk sugar) so they become lactose intolerant, just like some people. If a lactose intolerant cat drinks milk, vomiting or diarrhea may occur- not immediately but usually within 12 hours of having the milk.

If you try offering milk to your cat and she handles it without getting sick, then you should be able to offer milk in small amounts as a treat. Depending on the fat content of the milk you use, it will add extra calories to her daily diet so remember to take that into account if she is overweight. If your cat really likes milk but doesn't digest regular milk, try a lactose-free type milk and see if she can handle that. If you are feeding milk, remember that the milk or other treats should only make up about 10% of her daily diet.

Cats that eat a dry kibble diet often don't drink much water and can develop urinary problems and constipation. If your cat won't eat canned food to help with her daily fluid requirements, another option besides milk is to try a healthier liquid like clam juice or juice from a can of tuna. You can even make her a delicious tuna smoothie. Put 3 cups of water and a can of tuna in a blender. Once mixed, fill ice cube trays with the tuna smoothie and freeze. Put the frozen cubes in a container in the freezer to keep them fresh. Then when you need it, take out one cube at a time, warm it to body temperature and pour it over her dry food or in a separate bowl to drink. A word of caution: don't feed cats canned tuna on a daily basis as their sole diet due to the potential for high mercury levels and the risk of causing a vitamin B12 (thiamine) deficiency.

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