

Nutrition:

A mandatory treatment consideration in severely ill dogs and cats!



One of the first symptoms a pet owner often notices when their animal is sick is loss of appetite. Despite the fact that this lack of food intake is typically not the source of the illness, fasting itself will be detrimental to the body and delay recovery.

Cats have special nutritional needs!

Cats need special consideration in regards to their nutrition, because, as oppose to humans or dogs, they will not tolerate a few days of fasting. Cats can develop a secondary problem with their liver from not eating, it is called hepatic lipidosis. This disease will cause jaundice, vomiting, and declining general health and can have catastrophic consequences. So it is imperative to rapidly intervene when our feline friends are not eating!

If your animal refuses to eat for 24 hours or more, contact your veterinarian without delay. If your animal is not eating its normal portions for 3 to 5 days, or we are anticipating it will not do so, then the treatment plan with your veterinarian will have to include fulfilling the nutritional needs of your pet.

Treatment of an anorexic animal!

Stabilization of the dog or cat and treatment of the underlying disease in a timely matter are crucial. Force feeding or giving appetite stimulants will not resolve the causative disease and will unlikely be efficacious at reversing the metabolic consequences of fasting for pet that are seriously sick. Ideally, the pet would willingly eat his or her nutritional requirements, and delicious food will be offer regularly while in the hospital to stimulate the appetite. Put insisting too much or forcing an animal to swallow food against its will is not recommended as it is very stressful and may cause food aversion.

Feeding tubes for sick dogs and cats!

This is where feeding tubes come into play. They allow administration of food, water, and medications without any distress and permit proper nutrition and reversal of the negative consequences of fasting, as well as promote a healthy gastro intestinal track and faster recovery.

A small tube can be inserted without sedation or anesthesia into the nose all the way to the stomach.



This is the preferred method for very sick and unstable patients and is called a naso-gastric tube. If the pet is to be anesthetized, a tube placed in the neck (esophageal tube) or directly from the flank to the stomach (gastric tube) may be better options, mostly if nutritional support is expected to be necessary for a longer period. This way the animal can be feed comfortably and most can go home to finish their recover with the tube in place.

Intravenous nutrition?

In specific situations, IV food may have to be considered. This can be done in veterinary ICU only!



Figure 1. Luna was a cat with an infection in her chest (pyothorax) and a nasogastric tube was placed in her left nostril. She spent over 10 days in the hospital after which time she started to eat on her own and was able to go home. She made a complete recovery.



Figure 2. Radiograph of a cat with a nasogastric tube, travelling from her pharynx to her stomach. You can also see a jugular intravenous catheter on this radiograph.