



Paw Prints

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Columnist

What makes cats finicky?

This time you went out of your way and bought something you think Kitty would love for dinner. The purest grain-free tuna you could find. But she walked away after one sniff.

Meanwhile, Rover wolfs down his food. No problem.

How many times has your furry feline friend turned her nose up at the food you so lovingly provided?

We all have favorite foods, but felines can be downright fussy when it comes to what they will or won't dine on. And they'll often decide not to like something — just when you were convinced that you'd finally found the one food they loved.

So why are some cats

good eaters, while others act like they'd rather starve than eat what you give them?

First, rule out medical issues. Loss of appetite, especially when it comes on suddenly, can be an indicator of a serious medical problem. When a previously healthy cat stops eating for more than 24-48 hours, this is cause for concern and requires a veterinary visit.

According to veterinary nutritionist Dr. Jennifer Larsen, DVM, PhD, of the William R. Pritchard Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at the University of California Davis, there are a few possible reasons for choosy cats, including the way they were fed as kittens, bad associations with certain foods or cats just being cats.

Did you know that kittens who are fed a variety of foods after being weaned from their mother develop varied tastes?

Larsen says that cats that have been fed a variety of foods are more likely to try something new when offered. So, it's possible that a cat that is repeatedly fed the same food will develop a preference for that food, which can be difficult to change.

And, sometimes Kitty just may not be as hungry as you thought.

The reputation for being finicky may be related to the

fact that many cats, especially those who live indoors, have low energy requirement and don't need to eat much food to maintain their weight.

In the wild, some cats have natural preferences, so it can be normal for cats — just like people — to have favorite flavors and textures. One study showed that the wild cats in a region in Spain eat primarily rabbits when available.

Did you know that unlike a lot of species, felines don't go for sugar or salt? And according to Dr. Larsen, they do like the flavor of protein and amino acids.

Warming up your cat's food, as well as offering it when Kitty is hungry, can help. Praising and petting your cat at mealtime may also increase your cats' responsiveness. Researchers are confronting the challenge of finicky cats every day and have suggested that your feline's pickiness could be down to how their taste receptors respond to bitter compounds.

The researchers of the study, published in the journal *BMC Neuroscience*, identified two bitter taste receptors in domestic cats, known as Tas2r38 and Tas2r43, and studied how they respond to bitter compounds. They also used cell-based experiments to compare cat and human



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Dinah was one finicky cat that learned to like more foods by not being free fed.

taste receptors. The ability to taste bitter chemicals could have evolved as a form of protection against toxic compounds found in plants. Co-author Joseph Rucker, from Integral Molecular, was surprised to see that one of the cat taste receptors responded to a more limited range of bitter compounds compared to humans.

Here is one approach to get your finicky cat to eat. Remember, go slow and be patient.

If your furry feline friend is eating only dry food that you leave out at all times, try stopping this practice. Instead feed her twice a day, at set meal times, and take up what Kitty doesn't eat within half an hour. She gets no other food until the

next meal time. Be prepared that Kitty will make you feel like you're letting her starve. This phase of the process can be much harder on the human than it is on the cat. Persistence is the key. A little hunger at meal times can be a powerful motivator to get your cat to accept new food.

You can also try adding some incentives to tempt the finicky eater.

Sprinkle cooked or freeze-dried chicken or salmon on top of her meal. Or drizzle a little bit of tuna or clam juice over her meal.

Dealing with a finicky cat can be frustrating, and it can take time and patience, but hopefully these tips will go a long way toward getting your cat eating healthy food on a regular basis.

Raise a Paw for Furry Friends!

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Furry Friends Foundation, 501(c)(3), needs your support to feed Sisters-area pets this holiday! Please consider a donation of dry pet-food (dog or cat). We especially need cat food this year. Cash donations welcome! The pet-food is distributed in conjunction with the Sisters Kiwanis and Sisters-Camp Sherman RFPD's Spirit of Giving programs to help Sisters-area families.

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