

Pilling Your Pet

While many dogs and cats, as well as other household pets, are always ready and willing to take their oral medications, you may end up discovering that your pet may be quite challenging. Here are several methods that may help alleviate the headache that could arise from an oral prescription for your pet:



1. “Open and insert” is the most basic and simplest method to use if your pet will allow. Simply pull the mouth open and drop the medication on the back of the tongue. Some animals may need their muzzle held shut for a few seconds to ensure swallowing of the pill rather than spitting it out.
2. Disguising the pill in a treat may be a valid option if you have an animal that resists working in or around the mouth. Placing pills in hotdogs, meatballs, and peanut butter are tricks commonly used. Cheese cubes also seem to work very well as the animal is less likely to discover the pill and work it out. (Be sure to observe the animal eating the entire treat and make sure they don’t walk away while still chewing. Some are very good at spitting the pill out elsewhere!)
3. Oral suspensions are another option for the animal that refuses to swallow tablets or capsules (if the prescribed drug is available in oral form). Using a syringe or medicine dropper, place the tip underneath the lip on the side of the mouth. It usually works better to quickly squirt in most of the medication and let the animal lick and swallow rather than trying to force in a few drops at a time. Most capsules and tablets may also be dissolved in water and given via syringe, alleviating the need to place one’s hands in an unwilling animal’s mouth.
4. If capsules are being given and the pilling method is not agreeing with the animal, the capsule may be opened and the powder within is sprinkled over a treat or mixed in with a small amount of dog food. Make sure to allow the animal to only have access to this small amount of food until all the medication is consumed before feeding the animal the rest of the meal.
5. Over time, your sweet innocent pet may become a master of trickery to combat you in the ongoing battle of pilling. Some dogs even get to the point of allowing you in their mouth, placement of medications on the back of the tongue, but still refuse to swallow. A good trick to outwit your pet here is that once the pill is in the mouth, hold the mouth shut and squirt a small amount of water into the mouth from the side under the lip (same as above using a syringe or dropper). This should stimulate your pet to swallow and the pill goes down usually unnoticed.

Pets and their owners are both evolving new ways to pill and overcome being pilled. It is most important to try different methods with your pet and to administer medications to your animal in the least stressful, simplest, and safest way for both you and your pet. **Always ask your veterinarian before cutting, crushing, or dissolving your pet's medication. Some medications are less effective if the whole tablet or capsule is not given.**

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