

# Syringe (Assisted) Feeding

From Tanya's Comprehensive Guide to Feline Kidney Disease - [http://www.felinecrf.org/diet\\_and\\_nutrition.htm](http://www.felinecrf.org/diet_and_nutrition.htm)  
with additional information from Phyllis (Southern Counties Rescue)



If your cat is not eating for a day, or barely eating for two days it is critical that you begin assisted feeding (Syringe feeding). This entails placing your cat's food into a syringe and syringing it gently into the cat's mouth. [Hill's a/d](#) in particular can be made into a mush with water (my vet says to add 20% water) and syringed in easily. Alternatively, you can use a pâté-type food such Trader Joe's Chicken or Turkey or some other canned food and purée it using a blender or wisk. Add a little more water to make it more liquidy if it is too hard to squeeze out of the syringe, then draw it up into a syringe. Using warm water can make the

food more attractive to your cat. Caution – do not add so much water that the nutrition value is diminished.

I mix in a cup, keeping extra for the day in the refrigerator, warming it again in the microwave for about 12 seconds and stirring to be sure it's evenly mixed and heated. It should just feel barely warm to your skin. I mix fresh every day.



If you syringe feed, you may as well aim to feed a reasonable amount of food to your cat, bearing in mind your cat's calorie needs, this is a link to a [cat calorie calculator](#) --

[http://www.franklinvets.com/site/view/197641\\_FelineCalorieCalculator.pml](http://www.franklinvets.com/site/view/197641_FelineCalorieCalculator.pml). **An average indoor cat needs 180 to 250 calories/day.** This is about a 5.5 oz can a day. A 1 lb kitten needs 60 calories a day. This link tells you the calories in wet cat food - <http://www.petfinder.com/cats/cat-nutrition/wet-cat-food-calorie-count/> As a rule of thumb most kitten wet food has 35 calories per ounce and adult cat food 25-30 calories per ounce. Wellness Turkey has 41 calories/oz & their kitten 40.6 (that is why I have often fed my kittens from the big 12 oz can of Wellness Turkey or Chicken (41.6ca/oz.).

However, just as a cat doesn't eat a day's worth of food in one meal, you cannot syringe feed in one big session – you must spread the food over several smaller sessions a day. I use 10-12 ml syringes and give two syringe full at a time, but doing this every 3-4 hours adds up to a reasonable amount of food.

If you're out at work for most of the day, you will have to give more at one time, but should be able to feed at least three times a day (before work, after work and before bed). Yes, it is a commitment, but in some ways it is less time-consuming than following your cat around with platefuls of food. If you syringe feed 3 times a day, try to feed 3 or 4 full 12 cc syringes BUT do not feed so much that the cat throws up shortly after you feed. If the cat throws up food, feed again in 30 minutes to an hour and feed ½ what you feed the previous feeding.

It is also important to assist feed properly: make sure the food is reasonably mushy so it flows smoothly (don't forget to add water), go slowly, try to stay calm. **Insert the syringe in the side of the mouth, not directly in the front, so as to reduce the risk of the food going down the wrong way;** and give your cat time to swallow each mouthful. You must also only syringe in a little food at a time and give your cat time to swallow it. All this is in order to avoid the risk of aspiration pneumonia.



Don't worry if your first session doesn't go too well, you and your cat both need time to get used to this new routine. It may be more comfortable for your cat if you warm the food but be careful not to have it too hot, you don't want to burn your cat's mouth.

You can feel really mean when you assist feed, and it doesn't help that some vets claim that if a cat stops eating, it's time to let go. All I can say is, I'm glad that doesn't apply to humans too because, if so, I would have been dead years ago. *Note from Phyllis – I don't agree with any vets suggestion to put animal down if not eating, it depends on chance of recovery.*

Syringe feeding can actually reduce stress for both of you. You know your cat has eaten enough rather than watching anxiously and trying to ascertain if his/her food intake has been sufficient that day. Your cat is not being hassled by you waving twenty different foods under his/her nose. Plus you will also save money by not having to throw away twenty different rejected foods each day.

[Kathy assist feeds Toady](#) is a helpful video on how to assist feed a CKD cat.

[Syringe feeding Coco](#) is a good, clear video showing Marga feeding Coco (this is in Dutch but you will be able to see what Marga is doing).

## Feeding Syringes

Feeding syringes are NOT the same as syringes for fluids or medicines, they have larger and longer openings at the end. Your vet should be able to supply them but they may not have the size that works best for you. You can buy them without prescription on internet.

If they do not have feeding syringes and only offer you one that is used for fluids (smaller & shorter opening) ask if they have any curved tip syringes that are used for flushing wounds, I find these work by just cutting the end off to a wider hole opening.



Several internet sites sell syringes with an "O-ring" made by Baxa, which last longer and some people find easier to push than standard syringes but tip not as long & not quite as wide.



[Pippins Roost](#) sells ringless syringes which are supposed to last the longest.

The size syringe you should choose depends upon how strong your hands are - the smaller and weaker your hands are, the harder it is to push a larger syringe. I found a 10-12 ml one worked best for me with Tanya. *Note from Phyllis – I use the 10-12 mL syringe, having two already full of food if possible or sometimes I use a 20 mL.*

## Feeding Tubes

If all else fails, your vet may suggest a feeding tube. This is a device which is implanted into your cat and you then simply pour food and medications into it. These tubes can last for up to a year. One advantage of a feeding tube is that you can give water (not the fluids usually used for sub-Qs) orally rather than having to give sub-Qs. *I have also found these a lot less stressful for the cat.*

Administration of water in sufficient amounts to help maintaining optimal hydration, ease and reliability of administration of medications, and administration of the qualitatively ideal food in sufficient quantity are the main benefits of feeding tubes.

I (Phyllis) have had Oesophageal feeding tubes put into the neck of several cats to save their lives. These were cats that could recover if we could get them to eat, two had Fatty Liver and one had a damaged ear drum that made him stop eating, all 3 survived and are living happy lives today. The tubes were in for about a month. It made feeding, medicating and giving water easy and possible.

[Kitty Kollar](#) sells special collars to use with oesophageal feeding tubes. *(I didn't use one.)*

## Oesophageal Tube

There are three main types of feeding tube. The oesophageal tube, which can normally be inserted with sedation only, is inserted at the neck and runs down to the oesophagus. Usually food fed through such a tube must be blended. Your vet can tell you how much and how often to feed. *I found this easy to use and cat didn't fight it.*



## Gastrostomy Tube (PEG Tube)

The gastrostomy tube (sometimes called a PEG tube) is placed directly through the cat's side into the stomach. It normally has to be inserted using a general anaesthetic. This tube is less likely to interfere with the cat's swallowing mechanism than the oesophageal tube, but neither type seems to bother cats particularly.

## Naso-Gastric Tube (*I would not recommend*)

Occasionally vets use a naso-gastric tube, which can be inserted without anaesthesia. This tube is placed in the nose and runs down to the stomach. Unfortunately, these tubes are narrow so can only be used for liquids, plus they are really only suitable for short-term feeding of several days. If your cat is given such a tube, the throat can be a little sore for a few days after removal, so you will need to continue to feed smooth, easily swallowed food during this period.

**Note: ALL FEEDING goes into the SIDE of the mouth**

