

Things the family can do for the “picky” eater

1. Moisten dry food with warm water or add some canned food
2. Most dogs prefer the flavors of beef, chicken, pork, or lamb rather than vegetable protein such as soy, corn, and wheat, while some may show a strong preference for fish. Choose a food that provides these more desirable ingredients. Cats prefer beef, chicken, fish, and pork; select these ingredients for finicky cats
3. Warming the food can enhance the flavor
4. Add flavor enhancers to the diet, such as liver or poultry broths, bouillon cubes, or commercial gravy products and food enhancers for pets
5. Add very small amounts of cooked garlic to the food (large amounts can be toxic to both dogs and cats)
6. Add fresh fruit purées as a dressing on the food. Mashed apple or banana is a good choice to try first or add small amounts of artificial sweeteners such as aspartame. Avoid raisins, grapes, and xylitol which can be toxic
7. Mix in a small amount of a freshly cooked protein (e.g., hamburger, liver, chicken, fish). Slowly wean them off the fresh-cooked food to the lowest amount that is necessary to maintain appetite
8. Try foods of different flavors and texture (e.g., pumpkin). While novelty appeals to many pets, some will avoid anything new
9. Limit treats. The picky pet may be filling up on treats instead of eating its meals
10. If the pet is finicky because a new diet is being introduced, add small amounts of the new diet to the previous diet, then gradually increase the proportion of the new diet
11. Identify whether stress is a factor in reducing anxiety and treat with appropriate environmental management, behavioral management, and drugs where necessary
12. For hospitalized cats, provide the cat with its own carrier. Synthetic facial pheromone may increase food intake

Adapted from Ackerman L. What every dog owner, breeder and trainer should know about nutrition. Alpine Publications, Loveland, Colorado, 1996.