



Is your feline a fussy eater

We've probably all experienced a cat that's fussy when it comes to food but could there be something more to it than just fussiness? Emily Fowler looks at some of the reasons for cats turning into fussy eaters

It can be frustrating when your cat starts to turn its nose up at the food you're offering – "But it was his favourite yesterday!" you cry. Sometimes it might even seem that they're doing it just to spite us but is it really the case that some cats are fussy eaters or could there be something else behind their seemingly changeable tastes?

Think about the way that cats, both big and small, feed in the wild. They're opportunistic, eating what they can, when they can. Although the domestic moggy now has all the convenience and luxury of being fed to a regular schedule, if we look at how they would eat in nature, it can help us to discover the

reasons behind some of their so-called 'fussy' eating habits.

The food that's served

In the wild, your cat would eat a naturally varied diet. It could be a rabbit one day, a shrew the next and a tasty morsel of mouse to follow. If you're serving the same food, in the same flavour, each and every day, your cat might get bored with what's on offer. Think about it, just because something is your favourite dish, would you like to eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner every day?

If you've completely changed your cat's diet, maybe from one brand to

another or from a commercial cat food diet to a raw food diet, it's possible that the change has upset your cat's digestion. If you're planning on making a big change to their diet, it's always recommended that you do so gradually to avoid any upset tummies.

It's also the case that cats don't always react well to a change in their routine, so the fussy eating might be a psychological reaction to the change.

How the food is served

Cats prefer to eat food that's at a certain temperature. When they hunt, catch and kill their prey, they usually tuck in straight away while their meal is still warm. If you're serving your cat's food straight from the fridge, it's going to be much too cold for them. The ideal food temperature for cats is similar to the body temperature of their prey, so if you microwave it for a few seconds to take the chill off it, you might just find that your fussy feline tucks in with gusto. Warmed food also smells better, and don't forget that a cat's sense of smell is linked to their taste buds – so the better smelling the food, the more likely they are to eat it.

Speaking of their amazing sense of smell, one of the reasons it's so impor-

tant to them in the wild is because it lets them know whether their prey is contaminated, and as their sense of smell is so much more developed than ours, they'll know before you do if the food in their bowl is stale or slightly bad.

Similarly, while you might have washed your cat's food bowl thoroughly, have you rinsed it well enough in clean, hot water to make sure there are no traces of washing up liquid still on it? If your cat can smell the washing up liquid residue (and don't forget, just because you can't smell it, it doesn't mean that your cat can't), it's likely to be putting them off eating the food that's in the bowl.

How often the food is served

In the wild, a cat would eat between ten and twenty meals a day, basically whatever and whenever they could find something. If you're serving two big meals a day and your cat seems fussy about it, try feeding little and often and see if that makes a difference.

Where the food is served

We all know that cats like their privacy - and that means when they're eating too. The ideal location for their food bowls should be a quiet spot where they're unlikely to be disturbed by family members or other pets. Near the litter tray is also a no-no; would you like to eat in the same room as your toilet?

The food bowl

The ideal food bowl for your cat is wide and shallow. Cats don't like their whiskers touching the sides of the bowl, so if it's too deep or too narrow, your cat might find the act of trying to eat unpleasant. Similarly, as cats get older their joints aren't as supple as they once were, so it might be uncomfortable for them to bend down to eat.

If you think this might be the problem with your cat, try raising the food bowl up slightly so it's at a comfortable level. You can buy raised food bowls that are specifically designed for older cats or you could simply put it on something that takes it to the perfect height for your cat.

Health issues

If you're faced with a feline fussy eater and none of the above reasons seem to apply to your cat, now is the time for a visit to the vet to rule out any

underlying health issues.

One of the most common health reasons for a cat going off their food is dental. If your cat is suffering from toothache, gum disease or anything else that's making the act of eating

TIPS FOR FEEDING 'FUSSY EATERS'

- Offer some variation in the food you serve.
- Make dietary changes gradually to make the transition between foods easier.
- Make sure the food isn't too cold; try heating it up in the microwave for a few seconds first.
- Don't leave wet food out for too long - no longer than 20 minutes in hot weather.
- Rinse food bowls thoroughly in clean, hot water after washing to remove all traces of washing up liquid.
- Feed more meals during the course of the day but in smaller portions.
- Make sure the food bowl is in a quiet corner where your cat won't be disturbed.
- Use a food bowl that's ceramic, wide and shallow.
- If your senior cat has mobility problems, try raising the food bowl.

physically painful, it's going to seem like fussiness.

Upper respiratory infections can affect your cat's sense of smell and as smell is such an important factor in tasting food it can cause your cat to struggle to eat normally.

Other illnesses such as stomach problems, stress coming from a change in routine, allergies and more serious medical issues might also be playing a part, so it's important to get your cat fully examined.

If you rule out any other reason for your cat not wanting to eat, it is of course possible that your cat is just a feline fussy eater. So how do you deal with it? It can be tempting to keep offering the choicest morsels to try to tempt your cat to eat, even feeding from your own plate, but cats are delightfully cunning creatures and all that will do is teach them that by refusing food, they'll be rewarded.

Keep feeding to set mealtimes and be patient; if your cat's just being fussy he will eat when he's hungry. If your cat doesn't eat in a 24 hour period, that's the time to make an appointment with the vet. 🐾

