How to gradually introduce a new diet to your cat

Cats can be very particular about their food, and some take much longer than others to accept a change. **The key is patience, persistence and allowing your cat to feel in control!**

1. **Take your time.** There's no need to rush! Some cats will accept a new diet within a week, while others may need **4–6 weeks or even longer**. Unless your vet has advised otherwise, let your cat set the pace.
2. **Start with two separate bowls.** Continue offering their usual food as normal, but place a second bowl alongside it containing just a teaspoon of the new food (wet, dry or both). I call this **'hiding in plain sight'!** Cats are often more willing to try something new when they can investigate it in their own time, without feeling pressured or tricked into eating it.
3. **Be patient and keep offering it.** Initially, they may completely ignore the new food. That's fine! You may end up throwing away quite a bit, but keep offering a small, fresh portion each day. Sometimes simply becoming familiar with the smell and presence of a new food is the first step towards accepting it.
4. **Never withhold their usual food to force them to eat the new diet.** Cats must continue eating enough every day. Going without food can be dangerous, particularly for overweight cats, as it can lead to a serious liver condition called hepatic lipidosis.
5. **Once they start eating the new food, gradually increase the amount.** Try increasing it by just a teaspoon every few days, while reducing their usual food by a similar amount. Make these changes slowly, and only progress when they are happily eating the new food. If they become reluctant, go back a step.
6. **Keep mealtimes relaxed and normal.** Try not to hover over them, encourage them excessively or make a fuss about the new food. The more ordinary and predictable the feeding routine feels, the less suspicious they are likely to be!
7. **If they're still refusing after two weeks, consider another option.** Some cats simply dislike certain flavours or textures. If they're showing absolutely no interest despite repeated gentle introductions, we may need to try a different flavour, texture or brand, provided it meets their dietary requirements.
8. **If a diet change is medically essential, we have other options.** In some circumstances, we may consider medication to stimulate appetite or other veterinary-supported strategies to help with the transition. This isn't my preferred starting point, and we should never force a cat to go hungry, but sometimes a little extra help is needed.

Most importantly: Don't worry if progress is slow! Even sniffing or licking the new food is a positive first step. Small successes are worth celebrating, and a gradual, stress-free transition is far more likely to succeed than trying to rush things.

Please contact us if your cat stops eating, eats significantly less than normal, or develops vomiting or diarrhoea during the transition.