

# Three Ways to Introduce New Foods to Your Pet

by [Dr. Richard H. Pitcairn, DVM, PhD](#)

When you have a finicky eater on your hands, first make sure you serve the food in an appealing manner. Rather than serving refrigerated food cold, warm it up a bit (DO NOT USE A MICROWAVE - Microwaves causes the fat molecules to radically change, making fats less digestible, and ultimately can become harmful to your pets long-term health) which greatly increases aroma and appeal. Also, be sure to serve the food in a safe place, not in the middle of your path of movement around the kitchen.

Beyond that, you can choose one of three strategies: Introduce new foods gradually until they're accepted, let your animal go without eating until it's hungry enough to try the new fare or compromise with a combination of the natural diet and your Pet's old favorites.

**The Gradual Transition:** This not only helps your Pet get used to the taste of new foods but also gives the animal's digestive system time to adjust. Whenever the diet is changed abruptly, even from one commercial brand to another, temporary diarrhea or loss of appetite might occur. That's because the bacterial flora in the digestive tract is still adjusting to the new material.

So by switching over gradually, you can reduce or avoid acceptance problems and the possibility of discomfort for your Pet. If the gradual method doesn't work, you probably have a food addict on your hands, and more drastic measures will be necessary.

**Fasting Your Animal a Few Days:** This stimulates a lagging appetite, helps cleanse the body and deconditions old taste habits all at the same time.

To fast, your Pet needs a healthful setting -- plenty of fresh air, quiet, access to the outdoors and some moderate exercise.

Here's the process:

Begin the fast with a break-in period of one to two days. Feed a smaller quantity of the usual food during this first phase, perhaps adding a little meat, cooked grain and/or vegetables.

Move to a liquid fast for the next two to three days. During that time give your animal only liquids, such as pure water, vegetable juices and broths.

To break the fast, add some solid foods to the liquid regime over a day or two, perhaps vegetables (for dogs) or eggs, yogurt or small amounts of fresh meat (for dogs and cats).

After a day or so, increase the amount of meat and add a grain, gradually adding other ingredients until the recipe is approximated; then add the supplements (often the least accepted part of the diet, except for nutritional yeast, which many animals love).

In stubborn cases it often pays to continue fasting the animal a few more days. One client reported worriedly that her cat wouldn't eat any of the natural foods offered in the "breaking-out" period.

I advised her to keep the cat on liquids for a while longer. She did, and in a few days she called back enthused to say that her formerly finicky cat was now eating all kinds of things it would never touch before -- like vegetables, grains, meats, nutritional yeast and even soy grits! In addition to the longer fast, she found it helped to mix a little bit of fish (an old favorite) into the new diet.

Some people are frightened by the idea of fasting their Pet. At first it does seem that some animals would rather starve to death than eat anything but the food to which they're addicted. But the instinct for survival is very strong. Sooner or later, the Pet comes around.

Somehow we have convinced ourselves that a day or two without food will take a cat or dog close to death's door. Not true. Cats, being true carnivores, actually prefer a 28-hour eating cycle. In fact, healthy cats trapped in moving vans and such have been known to survive without any food or water for periods of up to six weeks. They have adapted to eating two or even three times a day because they live with people. However, this eating schedule is not natural to them, or even desirable.

Obese dogs have been known to fast on just water and vitamins for as long as six to eight weeks without ill effect. Wild carnivores fast naturally since the prey they live on may elude them for days at a time. So don't worry about trying the fast on your Pet for a few days.

How long should you let your animal go hungry before giving up and returning to the old diet? With cats, keep trying for up to five days. With dogs, two days should be enough. I use these figures because I have not seen healthy animals go longer than that before they become truly hungry.

Some cats or dogs, however, simply do not develop a normal hunger even after several days of not eating. A weak appetite like this is often a symptom of chronic illness. I do not mean that these animals are necessarily ill with symptoms or a defined disease. Rather, they are in a sub-optimal or low-grade state of health.

In such cases I use individualized homeopathic treatment to improve the animal's overall level of health. Afterward, the animal begins to eat more normally. If your Pet won't eat and you don't have access to a vet of this type, you may want to try the third approach.

**The Compromise:** Suppose you've tried a gradual transition and your Pet just won't convert to a new diet. Or perhaps fasting just doesn't work for you. It is difficult for some people to let their animals get hungry. They can't handle the agitation that the animal shows in asking for food. And in other cases, the cat or dog is not healthy enough to undertake a fast. In such situations, it is best to compromise by mixing the old food into the new.

Sometimes even a small bit of the Pet's familiar fare makes a difference. One woman I know finds that mixing just a spoonful of her Pets' favorite canned cat food into the natural recipe does the trick. "There seems to be something about the sight and sound of the old familiar can-opening process that gets them excited," she told me.

Another trick you might try is to pulverize some of the usual dry kibble in a food processor or blender and then sprinkle it over the natural food recipe, perhaps mixing some in as well. This is just the kind of catalyst that some finicky felines need to get them started eating a natural diet. Then nature takes over.

It's likely that after eating a compromise mixture of both natural and commercial foods for a while, your Pet will become so used to the new foods that the old ones will be forgotten. Eventually, many Pets turn up their noses at their old favorite canned food or kibbles.

\*Dr. Richard H. Pitcairn, DVM, PhD is a licensed veterinarian who co-wrote "Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats" with Susan Hubble Pitcairn. Dr. Pitcairn's introduction to holistic medicine over 20 years ago began with experiencing the effect of changing his dietary habits. After obtaining his PhD in advanced studies in immunology, he converted his practice to the use of homeopathy and nutrition. Recently, Dr. Pitcairn has turned his attention to training other veterinarians in this system of healing. This Book Now In Stock!