

‘Fussy’ Eaters

“My pet won’t eat anything: it is so fussy!!” This is a very common complaint heard by vets, pet stores and animal behaviourists everywhere. Fortunately, a truly fussy animal is actually very rare as most ‘fussy’ pets have trained their owners to feed them the ‘good stuff’. Have you ever seen an underweight ‘fussy’ pet? The truth is, unless your pet is losing weight, there’s no need for concern.

1. **Do you give your pet free access to food?** Try restricting food access to 10 mins a session (regardless of how many times you feed them in a day). When pets have free access to food they will eat when they feel like it. While this sounds ok, it’s difficult to monitor their intake and it is far too tempting to offer them something else if it looks like they haven’t eaten much (which teaches them to wait for dessert rather than eating their dinner first).
2. **Do you leave food in the bowl all day?** Try offering your pet small amounts at each mealtime then add more if need be (but only up to the daily requirement, of course). Not only will this save on wastage but food that sits in a bowl all day goes off/stale, has fly and cockroach muck all over it and is often crusty.
3. **Do you feed treats and/or bones?** These extras can be quite filling for some pets, especially the little fellas who have little tummies. If you’ve given them treats or bones during the day they won’t need as much food, if at all.
4. **Does your pet appear to only eat small amounts?** Pets only need to replace what they burn up so if they have been sleeping or lazing around all day (which is what they will do in the heat of summer or on a cold rainy day) then they don’t need to eat much. Furthermore, they may be sneaking in extras that you don’t know about (eg rubbish bin raids, lunchboxes, neighbours).
5. **Do you feed your pet leftovers/kitchen scraps?** Pets often like to do what we do so if we share a little bit of breakfast, a little bit of lunch and a little bit of dinner it all adds up. Besides, why would they eat their dinner when they could eat yours, especially when it gets them more attention.
6. **Does your pet eat some foods but not others?** Pets will develop a taste for things that aren’t necessarily good for them, just like children would rather eat ice cream before vegetables. Resist the temptation to give them something other than their normal diet just because they look at you with those longing eyes or because it seems like they haven’t eaten much that day.
7. **Has the food expired?** Good quality foods will have expiry dates because they don’t contain preservatives to prevent the fat content from oxidising.
8. **Where do you store the food?** Dry food should be stored in a cool dry place away from sunlight and moisture. Food stored incorrectly could become stale, mouldy or infested with weevils.
9. **Is the pet only skipping the occasional meal?** It is very normal for dogs and cats to skip a meal here and there. As long as their fluid intake is normal, they’re not losing weight and they’re not lethargic then there is no need to worry.
10. **Is the pet ill/anxious?** Pets generally won’t eat if they are sick or anxious. If the cat has gone more than 2 days or the dog more than 4 days without food get them checked by the vet.
11. **Have you changed their diet?** Dogs and cats are creatures of habit so immediate changes in food can put them off. Try a gradual change of diet over 4 or more days and try limiting access to food.
12. **Have you changed their routine (eg moved house, boarded them, new family member)?** Creatures of habit often find changes in life a little hard to take so may go off their food.

Tips to encourage your pet to eat

1. Add a little gravy or spoonful of tin food (increases flavour)
2. Try soaking dry food in a bit of warm water (makes food soft)
3. Microwave moist food for about 30secs (brings out aroma of the food)
4. Try super premium foods only available from vets and pet stores (few pets turn their noses up at them and most of them come with a 100% satisfaction guarantee so you will get your money back if your pet truly doesn’t like it, though you should go through the tips above before giving up)

