

## **NO NEED TO GIVE UP THE DRINK!**

**It goes without saying that drinking is essential for survival. The amount of water an animal needs to drink depends on its weight, age, state of health and environment. As the weight of the animal increases so too does its daily water requirements and its urine production.**

The amount of water taken in each day needs to equal the amount of water lost each day. Water is lost from the body through urine, sweat, faeces and the breath. Food should not be underestimated as a source of water. Not only does food contain water but also, as an animal uses food, water is a by-product. The amount of water produced as a by-product of food metabolism is related to the energy content of the food. Fats are very energy dense so produce the most water when they are digested! Tinned pet foods contain about 75% water and dry foods (kibble) contain about 10% water. Owners can increase the water content of tinned or dry foods by adding fresh water to the meal.

A cat fed on dry food needs to drink more than two and a half times more water than a cat fed with tinned food to get its daily intake of water. Every time a cat drinks a lap it takes in 0.1ml of fluid and on average it takes four laps a second.

### **Spotting the signs of dehydration**

Inadequate water intake or excessive losses can result in dehydration. An animal's body is made up of 70% to 80% water and dehydration only just becomes noticeable once an animal has lost 5% of the water from their body. Once an animal is 10% dehydrated it will appear obviously ill and owners will recognise an increased 'skin tenting time'. This is when a fold of skin is picked up then released and the subsequent speed it takes to return to its normal position. In a hydrated animal it will return to its previous position in 1 to 2 seconds. In an animal that is 10% dehydrated it will take 20 to 30 seconds. Animals that are 15% dehydrated are usually close to death.

### **Different drinking habits**

Healthy dogs and cats are quite different in their approach to water. Dogs will drink filthy, standing, brackish water, preferably while standing in it. Most owners provide their dog water from a bowl close to their food and this is perfectly acceptable for healthy dogs.

Cats have separate forays for hunting and drinking from the edge of a stream and consequently prefer to have their food and water separated by half a room's distance. If their food and water are next to each other it can put them off drinking. Cats prefer to drink running water because it's 'natural' for them, meaning they are less likely to drink standing water from a bowl. There may be other reasons for this too:

- [ Cats' whiskers collide with the edges of the bowl when they lower their head to drink and they can find this disconcerting

- [ A cat drinking from a stainless steel bowl can be alarmed by their own reflection from the mirrored surface

- [ Cats have poor close vision and the surface of standing water can be difficult for them to see.

Free falling water or a rippling surface in a wide bowl can encourage cats to drink. Pet Fountains are available which many cats find attractive.

### **Good hydration is crucial for unwell pets**

If a dog or cat is unwell, owners often have to encourage them to drink. In these situations pet fountains are appropriate for BOTH dogs and cats. Kidney problems can cause dehydration so it is important to maintain good fluid intake. Similarly, increased water intake is also an important treatment for cystitis in dogs and cats and anything that increases water intake will assist with the management of this condition.

Drinking and feeding facilities should normally be at least half a room apart for cats but can be closer for older animals because moving between them may be a problem. Placing multiple pet fountains in different rooms ensures that a pet with mobility issues is never far away from a source of water.

Owners need to ensure that unwell pets have drinking facilities in multiple and easily accessible sites around a home to encourage their pets to drink – pet fountains or drinking bowls should be widely recommended by retailers. In this way, no matter what the weather throws at us, our pets will be well hydrated – come rain or shine.

