

# Wilmette Pet Center

*"the place for people who love pets"*

## Cats and hydration

You hear a lot of stories of older cats with kidney problems; kidney disease is the leading cause of death in domestic cats. You may have experienced this in your own life with your own pets. It's a common problem for older cats, but it doesn't have to be.



Cats are thought to have been domesticated from species living in western Asia and northern Africa. Cats are, originally, desert creatures, and typically do not have a big "thirst response". While they do drink water, it's usually not all that their bodies need. They evolved to obtain most of their moisture from their prey items. In the wild, rodents, lizards, and birds provide hydration, supplemented by drinking free standing water. Now

look at our domesticated cats, keep indoors and feed a diet mostly of dry kibble. After all, we've always heard that dry food keeps a cat's teeth clean and canned food makes their teeth get weak. But it turns out a lifetime of this diet can slowly dehydrate them, eventually leading to an older cat with those dangerous kidney problems.

**There are several things that you can do to help prevent these problems later in life:**

**Use a cat water fountain.** Cats are much more likely to drink water that is in motion – we've all seen cats drink from faucets. Moving water tends to feel colder, and cat drinking fountains have built in filters to help it stay cleaner than still, stagnant water. We love the Cat it Fountain; it's a great way to increase their water consumption. Check it out [here](#).



**Place several water dishes around your house.** Cats are more likely to drink when there are multiple sources. Wider water dishes can get your cat to drink more, as they hate to have their whiskers touching anything, even the side of their dishes.

**Add water, or something tasty like low sodium chicken or beef broth, to their dry kibble.**

Allow it to sit for a few minutes for it to soften. The bowl should be picked up after a few hours to prevent the food from drying out and going bad. This is a good way to get fussier cats to eat, as it adds some flavor and the moisture releases the aroma of the food.

**Better yet, switch them to canned food, as this contains higher levels of moisture.** Dry cat food contains around 8-10% moisture content, while canned food can be as high as 80%. You do need to feed more than dry food, but this gives them the water how their bodies expect to get it. There's another reason to go to wet food: Your cat's teeth are actually sharp and angled, having evolved to shear meat, not flat to grind dry kibble. In fact, when you hear cats crunching their dinner, they are actually breaking up the kibble with the roof of their mouth. So it's not only easier for them to eat, but it effectively gives them that vital moisture. For older cats, some people will even add extra moisture, water or broth, to their canned food to make it even soupier.



**These teeth are meant to cut meat, not grind their food.**

**By far the best diet for your cat and hydration is raw food.** This food is the closest thing to their natural diet. It has not been altered with heat or friction, which preserves the innate vitamins and minerals, along with essential amino acids and enzymes (processed kibbles have these added back to the food after cooking them out.) Two of our favorites are [Stella & Chewey's](#) and [Nature's Variety](#).



Cats are about 60% water, and they must have continual hydration to maintain this level. Symptoms of dehydration in cats are lethargy, dry gums and eyes, and skin that stays peaked when you lift a fold. Severe dehydration is a matter for your vet to address, as intravenous fluids may be needed. Giving fluids in a more natural way can help keep your cat well hydrated and out of the vet's office. Try offering water in a variety of ways; your cat will definitely let you know what they like!