

My Cat Prefers Milk Over Water

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, discusses dehydration in cats.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: Our cat is 2 years old. We have had him about three months after getting him from a rescue shelter. He is a wonderful, calm pet and we have not had any problems with him at all. You would think he has lived here forever.

My problem is that a couple of weeks ago I started giving him 2 percent milk as a treat only, about 2 tablespoons maybe two times a day. Well, he loved it and almost immediately I do not see him drinking his water. Now I am afraid to stop giving him milk but I do mix it, half-water and half-milk. I was told if cats do not get fluid, that they will have liver failure and die, so I am afraid. If I stop giving him milk, will he go back to drinking his water when he is thirsty?

A: I wouldn't worry about dehydration in your young healthy cat. It is possible that he's drinking less water because you're giving him fluid from another source, i.e. the milk. However, it sounds like the amount you're giving is pretty small, so I can't be sure.

Cats do not go into liver failure from not getting fluid. I think you've confused not drinking with not eating. Some cats, if they go for a few days without eating, can develop hepatic lipidosis, a serious liver disorder.

Although you do not see him drinking his water, cats can sometimes be secretive about their drinking. He's probably drinking his water and you just don't realize it. If you stop giving him his milk, I suspect that he will go back to drinking his water when he's thirsty.