

My Cat Is Gobbling Up the Other Cat's Food

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger discusses ways to control cat's overzealous eating habits.

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Q: I have two sibling cats, Darwin and Beagle, who I adore. The problem is that Darwin eats too much, too quickly. He first gobbles up his food as fast as he can and then runs over to his sister's bowl and eats her food. Since he is so insistent, she doesn't argue with him, she sadly watches, hungry, as he eats her meals. Immediately after his food rampage he vomits. The cats are fed both dry food and a little canned food twice a day, early morning, and in the evening when I come home from work. How can we change this behavior?

A: Darwin's overzealous eating habits can be modified without sending him to an over-eaters support group! Start by ensuring that he and his sister are fed enough meals during the day. You can divide their regular dry food rations into four or five different meals. A timed feeder can be programmed to dispense food for a set amount of time a couple of times a day while you are at work and also once at night while you sleep.

Instead of putting Darwin's dry food in bowls, slow his eating down and make the dining experience more challenging by putting his morning and evening meals in puzzle toys and treat balls. One of my favorite puzzle toys has eight different compartments that are covered by sliders. The dry food is placed in the compartments. In order to eat, Darwin will have to push the sliders away to reveal the food. Another challenging food puzzle toy is composed of three hollow plastic dog bones, stacked on top of each other and connected in the middle with a pin. The food is placed in the hollow compartments of the bones. Darwin will have to spin the separate bones in order to gain access to his food. Treat balls are also useful for slowing a cat's intake down. These are hollow plastic balls with holes in them. Dry food or treats are placed inside them. When the treat balls are rolled the food falls out of the holes. There is one kind of treat ball commercially available that has a recording device. You can record a message to Darwin that he'll hear every time he pushes or rolls the ball around.

Don't forget Beagle! She needs to be able to eat her meals without continually looking over her shoulder for Darwin. She will appreciate having her own Darwin-free dining area during the morning and evening meals.