

WATER – THE FORGOTTEN NUTRIENT



Make your customers water aware with simple tips on keeping their pets hydrated

Water is sometimes referred to as the forgotten nutrient, yet it is the most important. In this feature, PFMA shares some tips and advice to pass on to your customers so they become more water aware.

THE ROLE OF WATER

Water is involved in every bodily function and makes up a significant proportion of any animal's body weight. This is around 56 percent for an adult dog and 15 percent water loss would be lethal. Water helps to:

- Maintain body temperature
- Metabolise body fat
- Aids digestion
- Lubricates and cushions organs
- Transports nutrients through the body and flushes toxins out of the body and so has an important role in helping to prevent urinary tract issues.

HELP OWNERS BECOME WATER AWARE WITH THE FOLLOWING ADVICE:

For all pets, a supply of clean, fresh water needs to be available always. As a helpful guide and to increase a pet's water intake try the one + one rule. This means for every one pet one water bowl + one more should be provided. So, for example if an owner has two cats provide two bowls (one bowl each) + one more = three in total.

Many pets (especially cats) can be shy and so will often eat and drink in peace and quiet. If a pet is shy water bowls can be placed in quieter areas and also in parts of the house where the pet spends most of their time in. The kitchen isn't always the best place

In addition to the daily supply of drinking water, pets will get some moisture from their food. A wet pet food for cats and dogs is about 70-80 percent water. Pets on a wet diet may drink less than those on a dry food.

Healthy dogs will normally drink enough water to stay hydrated. There are many factors that can affect how much a dog will drink, for example, the environmental temperature, the amount of exercise the dog performs during the day etc. Owners need to replenish water supplies when needed.

Cats evolved from desert-dwelling creatures that developed an ability to conserve water quite well and didn't need a lot of water to survive. As a result, cats tend to have a low thirst drive. However, it is still important that cats drink water and there are a number of ways cats can be encouraged to drink more:

- Multiple water bowls around the house will help with water consumption. Consider placing bowls in different or unusual places around the house. Cats often pay more attention to things that are different. Cats can also be shy.

- Vary the type of bowl, or consider using vessels other than bowls. Some cats will refuse to drink out of stainless steel bowls, whilst others will refuse plastic drinking vessels.
- Water fountains are available in a variety of different configurations and styles. Many of them feature a waterfall as well as a bowl area from which a cat can drink.
- Keep watering points away from litter trays. Cats don't like to eat and drink near to their toilet.
- Sometimes adding a couple of spoonfuls of juice from a can of tuna (tuna in water, not brine) to a bowl of drinking water will draw a cat's interest and encourage them to lap. Remember not to let the flavoured water sit around for too long before replacing it with fresh water; the same principles owners would follow for their cat's wet food.
- Including wet food in the diet is a natural way of increasing water intake.

For rabbits, the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund (RWAFF) provide some good advice:

- Bowls are better than bottles as lapping from a bowl is more natural to rabbits. The spouts of bottles can get clogged. Bowls may get spilled or knocked. RWAFF recommend offering both to encourage drinking and always ensure a fresh supply. Any water spillage should be cleared up so that your pet's bedding stays clean and dry. Change the water in both daily, clean them regularly to keep them free from slime and debris.

Rabbits eating a lot of fresh grass and greens will drink less, whilst those eating hay will drink more.

Monitoring water consumption is a useful way to monitor a pet's health. If there is a notable increase or decrease in water intake, owners should be encouraged to consult their vet as it can be a sign of certain conditions such as diabetes. 🐾

