



## Administering Subcutaneous Fluids (also known as SQ or Sub-Q Fluids)

Expert health and behavior advice from the feline care professionals at  
**Paws, Whiskers & Claws**  
**The Feline Hospital**  
[www.pawswhiskersandclaws.com](http://www.pawswhiskersandclaws.com)

Your cat may need to receive subcutaneous fluids for various reasons: to keep her hydrated when she's ill, to assist in recovery from injury or illness, to combat the effects of kidney disease, etc.

If this becomes necessary, we will teach you how to administer the fluids at home, or you can bring the cat in to the office and wait while we administer the fluids for you. The process takes only about 5 minutes.

It may seem daunting to think about inserting a needle into your cat to give fluids, but it's actually a simple procedure that gets easier with practice. Detailed steps are described below, and our staff will give you a hands-on lesson. We have lots of tips to make it easy for you and your cat!

The amount and frequency of fluids will be determined by your vet, and may be adjusted after periodic rechecks of your cat's blood and/or urine.

### **Location**

You need a location where you can hang the bag of fluids. You can use a picture-hanger hook in the wall, or a coat hanger that can be hung anywhere, or some other method. The bag must be hung at least a couple of feet above the cat.

You can try different ways to administer fluids. Some people sit on the floor with the kitty in their lap. Others like to work on a table or counter. Many people administer fluids in the bathroom because the countertop is at a convenient level, they can hang the bag easily, and they can close the door. Try different methods until you know what works best for you and your cat.

### **Supplies**

You'll need these items, which you can purchase from PWC:

- Bag of fluids (saline or Lactated Ringers solution)
- Line (1 line can be used for 2 bags of fluids; then replace it)
- Needles (a new needle each time you give fluids)

You may also want to have some canned food or treats to keep the cat occupied and happy while you give fluids. If your cat is not food motivated, try brushing or some other form of positive reinforcement.

## **Details**

At this time, your veterinarian recommends the following:

Amount of fluid to give: \_\_\_\_\_

How often and when: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of first recheck: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Instructions**

Relax! If you're nervous, your cat will notice and may become agitated.

1. Attach the line to the bag. Remember that both ends of the line are sterile; don't touch them or let them fall to any surface.
2. Attach the needle (still covered) to the end of the line. Hang the bag as high as you can. Squeeze the reservoir at the top of the line until it is half full of fluids.

If you squeeze too much, turn the bag upside-down and squeeze the reservoir until it is half full again.

3. Run a stream of fluids through the line to remove all the air from the line. You are now ready to administer subcutaneous fluids to your cat.

There are 1000 mLs in each bag and the numbers indicate the amount of fluid remaining in the bag. Each number on the bag represents 100 mL and each mark between represents 50 mLs. Before you start, check the amount of fluid in the bag to determine where you should stop. For example, if the level is at 300 mL and your cat gets 150 mL every day, you'd stop the flow when the level of fluids gets down to the mark between 4 and 5 (the 450 mL level). Note: From the 9 to the bottom of the bag equals 100 mL.

4. Position the cat on a table or countertop, on your lap or on the floor next to you.
5. Remove the needle cap and set it aside. Using the three finger method pull out a pocket of skin on one side of the cat, in front of the hip. Insert the needle into the skin pocket. Do not push the needle all the way through the skin pocket.
  - Insert the needle parallel to the cat's body, not pointed toward the body.
  - Point the tip of the needle toward the cat's head; if the cat runs away, the needle will fall out without tearing the skin.
  - You can also administer the fluids in the scruff of the neck. This is useful if the cat is squirmy and there is no one to help hold your cat.
6. With your thumb, spin the roller on the line flow control mechanism up to start the flow of fluid.
  - Look at the reservoir to make sure the fluid is flowing and not just dripping slowly. If it is dripping, pull the skin slightly forward, away from the needle, in case the skin was against the end of the needle, preventing

a steady flow. Also check that the line is not crimped.

7. After the correct amount of fluids have been administered, stop the flow by spinning the roller on the flow control mechanism down with your thumb.
8. Pull the needle out of the skin pocket. You can pinch the skin slightly at the needle entry point in order to slow leakage before the skin seals itself. However, some leakage will occur; this is normal, so don't be alarmed. You may also see some blood or blood-tinged fluid leak out; you may have nicked a tiny vessel in the skin. This will heal quickly on its own and is also normal.
9. Put a new, sterile needle on the line, give your cat a kiss, and you're done until next time! Be sure to place the cap back on the used needle and dispose of it properly.

To make the experience more pleasant for your cat, feed her some canned food or treats while she's getting fluids or right afterward. She will learn to associate the procedure with something she enjoys! Don't always insert the needle in the same spot on the cat; alternate between sides.

It may make your cat more comfortable if you warm the fluids first by immersing the bag (but do not immerse the needle) in hot water. You MUST TEST the fluid temperature on your skin (such as on the inside of your arm) before giving it to the cat so you don't scald her!

**Caution:** If your cat is due for fluids and you notice that the fluids from the last treatment have not been absorbed, do not give more fluids! Call our office for instructions from the veterinarian the next business day.

**Caution:** If you ever notice your cat's breathing is labored, do not give fluids. Call our office or the emergency clinic right away.

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### Additional Resources

A number of Web sites offer videos and photographs showing how to administer subcutaneous fluids. You can search for yourself or try these Web sites:

<http://partnersah.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/subcutaneous-fluid-therapy>

<http://www.felinecrf.com/managh.htm>

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