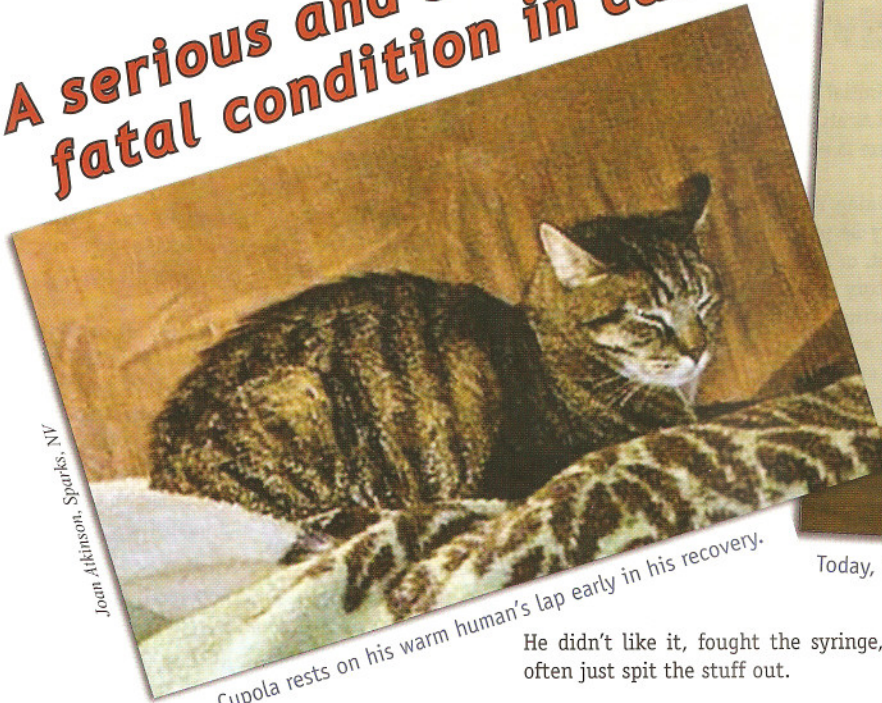


The Challenge of Feline Anorexia

By Joan Atkinson, Sparks, NV

A serious and sometimes fatal condition in cats



Joan Atkinson, Sparks, NV

Cupola rests on his warm human's lap early in his recovery.



Joan Atkinson, Sparks, NV

Today, Cupola has recovered back to his handsome robust self.

Cupola quit eating and we didn't know why.

Tests showed slightly elevated liver enzymes, which meant that if he didn't eat soon – things would go downhill fast. The vet gave us some special mushy food and a feeding syringe to shoot it from.

Feline anorexia can strike at any time and a cat will just quit eating for no apparent reason. If cats don't eat for even a few days, there can be serious health consequences. Organs, especially the liver, are compromised and unless something is done quickly, it's a speedy slide to system shutdown and death.

Usually there's a physical reason a cat won't eat, but in Cupola's case, it began when his littermate Hinkey started vomiting and we limited his food intake. Taking away Cupola's easy access to the communal crunchy bowl, combined with the trauma of watching his beloved brother in hourly duress is probably what started him on the road to anorexia. No doubt he was also traumatized when we left him alone to take Hinkey to the vet – the brothers had never been apart before.

Cupola acted depressed and wasn't interested in anything. He spent all of his time in a fleece nest in the bedroom. Every few hours, we'd get him up and try to get the special food into him.

He didn't like it, fought the syringe, and very often just spit the stuff out.

As he worsened, he got skinnier and his personal hygiene suffered – his coat became dull and scruffy, and remnants of previous meals remained stuck in his fur. I kept bothering him with food and he got fed up, abandoning the nest to under our king-sized bed to escape me. It got harder to reach him while his struggles got weaker each time we dragged him out.

I tried to stimulate his appetite with other foods. He liked plain yogurt and boiled chicken, both in ridiculously small portions. Raw and cooked fish offered little success. He seemed to want to eat, but would hover over the bowl and just couldn't quite do it. He acted nauseous.

The vet suggested half a Pepcid once a day, 20 minutes before feeding. He again urged force feeding and threatened a surgical procedure to insert a feeding tube. Not wanting to put Cupola through surgery, we worked even harder to get food into him. Skinny and weak, he still battled the food syringe stuck in his mouth. We ended up with food on the floor, on me, and on the cat – only occasionally getting it in the cat. In desperation, I tried just prying his mouth open and swiping my glop-loaded finger across the back of his tongue. He still fought me and it was still messy, but more food seemed to be getting into the cat.

I began feeding Cupola every two hours and though he wasn't taking much, by doing it so often, I hoped that the aggregate amount reached

a reasonable level. That, combined with my other tempting food choices, seemed to work.

As the days passed, there were small improvements. He came out from under the bed on his own and returned to his nest. He started to bathe himself and, as he gained strength, it got even harder to force food into him. However, he still wasn't eating much on his own.

In the search for something to stimulate his appetite and wean him back onto real cat food, I found that he loved anything with even a hint of tuna in it – the fishier, the better. I first had success with plain tuna juice, and then later, the tuna itself. As time passed and his appetite improved, he started eating stinky, tuna-flavored canned food, later progressing to crunchies mixed with fave kitty treats. It was a happy day when I put the syringe away and got rid of the glop he had never liked but was valued for its high-calorie content.

Today, both our SPCA babies are doing well. Hinkey recovered nicely from intestinal blockage surgery and Cupola has regained his weight and is again the chatty, personality plus, milk-jug-ringing-chasing goofball we knew.

Joan Atkinson is a local freelance writer and proud mother to two spoiled tabbies. During one of her many traumatic visits to the vet's office, she learned of a litter of rescue puppies, two of which were later adopted by friends. If it hadn't been for the sick cats...