How to give a pet a pill

Giving pills to your pet may be more traumatic for you than the animal, but it doesn't have to be.

There are many ways to get the job done. You can hold a small dog or cat like a football or a baseball; wrap the cat like a burrito; try decoys and disguises; or arm yourself with squeeze cheese.

Whatever you do, "Be cool, calm, collected and quick," said Janet Winikoff, director of education for the Humane Society of Vero Beach, Fla.

Cats are usually harder to medicate than dogs. Many dogs, especially bigger ones, appear to inhale their food, so they barely notice a little medicine. Cats are more likely to chew and bite down on a pill, spit it out and leave it behind.

Everyone seems to have a trick. One person online suggested crushing the pill, mixing it with something sticky and rubbing it on the cat's gum. Someone else suggested dabbing a squirt of squeeze cheese on your cat's paw right after giving a pill so the animal has something else to think about besides the bad taste of the medicine.

For dogs who must take pills for a long time, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals suggests cutting up hot dogs or cheese, or using small chunks of ground beef or chicken, and giving your dog 10 to 20 decoy treats in a row. Do that two or three times a day for several days to prepare your dog before sneaking a pill into one of the bites.

Maria Ramirez, director of animal care at the Vero Beach shelter, prefers cheese cubes, but said the most important thing is to massage the animal's throat to make sure the pill goes down properly and the pet doesn't choke.

They also recommended keeping a cat's nails trimmed and wrapping it in a blanket or towel (the burrito look) before administering a pill. Blowing gently on your cat's nose is likely to make it lick its nose, then swallow, they wrote.