



Bringing Your Cat to the Veterinarian

Bringing your cat to a veterinary appointment can be stressful and sometimes difficult. However with patience and time, this can be a much less stressful experience for you and your cat.

Getting Started

It is important to keep yourself calm in order to keep your cat calm. Cats can sense anxiety and frustrations, which in turn make them anxious and nervous.

Cats do not do well with change or unfamiliar events. For most cats, being put in a carrier, riding in the car and going to the vet is very different from their usual routine. It will take time for them to become accustomed to the carrier and riding in the car, so be patient.

Cats respond to positive reinforcement, not to punishment or force. Forcing your cat into the carrier when they are uncooperative makes the process more difficult for you and scary for your cat. Using treats and food to make the carrier and car a positive experience will get better results.

Carrier Training

We want your cat to view the carrier as a safe and comfortable place. This starts days to weeks before your cat goes to the veterinarian. Our goal is to give positive experiences with the carrier.

1. Make sure the carrier is large enough for your cat to walk into and lay down comfortably. It should be big enough for the cat to turn around in but still fit in your car and work for your traveling purposes. Sturdy carriers made of plastic or fabric carriers with internal framing are usually less scary and easier to work with than flimsy fabric carriers.
 - a. The ideal carrier for the best experience for your cat is plastic, hard-sided and sturdy. Ideally, it can be easily taken apart or have a door on the top of the carrier so the cat does not need to be pulled or dumped out of.
 - b. Have a carrier for each cat in your household. Most cats do better with their own carrier for travel. The cats will already be stressed, and forcing them to be in a confined space with another cat often makes it worse. This is also important in case of emergency when all of your cats need to be contained for their safety.

2. Some cats get car-sick and correlate the carrier with car rides. Having a carrier with windows or holes for the cat to see their surroundings in the car can help with this.
 - a. Using a carrier that can be seat belted in will also prevent the carrier from sliding around corners, which contributes to stress and motion sickness.
3. Place the carrier in a room or space of the home the cat spends much of his/her time in. Ideally, the carrier would be stored there full time. If space does not allow this, then bring the carrier out days to weeks before the appointment for your cat to become accustomed to the carrier.
4. Place a blanket, towel or other item in the carrier that has a familiar smell to your cat. Some people will use a T-shirt.
5. Place favorite treats in the carrier for your cat to find. This gives an immediate positive reinforcement for checking out the carrier. Feeding meals in the carrier is another option for cats who are food lovers.
6. It can take time for your cat to view the carrier as a safe place, so do not get discouraged if it takes a few weeks.

Emergency Trips in the Carrier

If an emergency occurs or if there is just not enough notice for getting your cat comfortable with the carrier before an appointment, there are ways to make the process easier.

1. Stay calm and move with purpose. Your cat will sense you are up to something and become anxious and hide if they see you are nervous.
2. Place the carrier in a small room with few or no places for your cat to hide. Bring the carrier into the room with your cat.
3. Place familiar items in the carrier, such as a blanket, towel or a shirt that smells like home. Spraying or wiping the contents of the carrier with Feliway (feline happy pheromone product) will help calm your cat.
4. Encourage your cat to enter the carrier with treats or toys in the carrier. Talking in a calm and soothing voice will help.
5. If your cat will not go in the carrier willingly there are options.
 - a. If the carrier opens on the top, place the cat in through that door.
 - b. If the carrier's top half is removable from the bottom, take the carrier apart, place the cat in the bottom and reattach the top with your cat in the carrier.
 - c. If your carrier does not come apart, tip the carrier on its end, with the door open and facing up. Then, carefully place your cat in the carrier, rear end first.

At the Appointment

Once at the appointment, it is helpful to stay calm for your cat the best you can. The technician and veterinarian will make the appointment as least stressful as possible for your cat and you. If at any point you have a concern, please bring it to the attention of a veterinary staff member.

Take cues from your cat. If your cat is very nervous and wanting to hide in the corner of the exam room, let them hide until the exam. If they are frantic or hissing, it may be best for them to go back in the carrier until the exam. Many cats decide to remain on the scale until the exam and that is okay. Others want to be social and greet everyone, which is always welcome!

Returning Home

Cats are very sensitive to smells, especially new or strange smells. If you have a multi cat household, the cat left home may not recognize the cat returning from the appointment because he/she smells like the veterinary office. Below are tips to keep everyone happy once you are home again.

Single Cat House Hold

1. Keep your cat in the carrier for a few minutes after returning home. Many cats get very worked up from travel and veterinary visits. This gives them a chance to acclimate to being back home and hopefully do not feel the need to run and hide right away.
2. If your cat tends to run and hide once home, or continue to be stressed once home, let them out of the carrier in a quiet room with familiar smells, food, water and litterbox for a few hours. Once they appear to be comfortable, let them out to return life to normal.
 - a. Some cats become over stimulated easily and these cats may need to be in a room for a day or two.

Multi Cat Household

1. Keep the returning cat in their carrier once home to let the other cat come up to smell him/her.
2. If both cats are calm, let the returning cat out of the carrier.
3. If there are signs of tension including hissing, changes in posture or other abnormal behavior, or if there have been conflicts in the past, move the returning cat into a separate room. Place food, water and litterbox in the room along with objects with

familiar smells of home. The cat may need to be in this room for 24 hours to be recognizable to the other cat.

4. To speed up this process or to ensure it is successful, you can mix the two cat's smells. Use a glove or a small cloth to pet the cat that stayed home. Using the same glove or cloth, pet the returning cat. Then go back and pet the other cat. Doing this a few times mixes the smells so the home cat will recognize the returning cat sooner.
5. If there are still problems between the cats, the returning cat will need to stay in the room longer or may need a longer reintegrating plan. If so, call your veterinarian to determine the ideal plan for your household.
6. Using Feliway (synthetic feline pheromone) will help make this process easier.
7. If this is usually a problem for your cats, bringing both cats to veterinary appointments may help or eliminate the problem since they will both smell the same once home.

Bringing your cat to veterinary visits can be stressful for both you and your cat, but with planning and patience it will be easier to provide the medical care your cat requires and deserves.

Resources

Getting Your Cat to the Veterinarian, Sponsored by Ceva