

Getting Your Cat to the Veterinarian

You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team. You can be instrumental in helping your cat have more relaxed veterinary visits and improved healthcare.

Choosing the Best Carrier

The best carriers are inexpensive hard sided carriers that open from the top and the front, and can be taken apart in the middle. An easily removable top allows a cat which is fearful, anxious or in pain to stay in the bottom half of the carrier for exams. Your veterinarian can often do the exam in the bottom of a well-designed carrier. Avoid carriers that require a cat to be pulled from or dumped out for an exam.

Choose carriers that are sturdy, secure and stable for the cat, as well as easy for you to carry. Carriers should be seat belted into the car to keep your cat safer and to reduce the bumpiness of the ride.

Some cats like to see out, whereas others are less anxious when the carrier is covered with a blanket or towel to prevent seeing the unfamiliar.

Understanding your Cat's Behavior

- Cats are most comfortable with the familiar, and need time to adjust to the unfamiliar. The visit to the veterinarian is often difficult because the carrier, car and the veterinary hospital are usually unfamiliar. Respect your cat's need for time to become familiar with any new situations, people and places.
- Stay calm. Cats can sense our anxiety or frustrations, which may cause them to become fearful or anxious.
- Cats do not learn from punishment or force. Give rewards to encourage positive behavior. For example, if your cat is sitting calmly in or near a carrier, give a treat. Likewise, rewards can be given to help your cat become familiar with the type of handling that may be encountered at the veterinarian (ex. Handling paws, ears and mouth). A treat is what is highly desirable to your cat, which may be in the form of food, play or affection. Be persistent and reward every time.

Helping your Cat Become Comfortable with the Carrier

The goal is for your cat to learn to associate the carrier with positive experiences and routinely enter voluntarily.

- Make the carrier a familiar place at home by leaving it in a room where your cat spends a lot of time.
- Place familiar soft bedding inside the carrier. Bedding or clothing with your scent can make them feel more secure.
- Place treats, catnip or toys inside the carrier to encourage the cat to enter at home. Often, you will first see that treats are removed from the carrier during the night.
- It may take days or weeks before your cat starts to trust the carrier. Remain calm, patient and reward desired behaviors.
- If you still have trouble, you may need to assess the carrier itself.

Getting an Unwilling Cat into the Carrier

If your cat needs to go to the veterinarian right away, and is not yet accustomed to the carrier, the following may help:

- Start by putting the carrier in a small room with a few hiding places. Bring the cat into the room and close the door. Move slowly and calmly. Do not chase the cat into the carrier. Encourage the cat with treats or toys to walk into the carrier.
- If your cat will not walk into the carrier, and your carrier has an opening on the top, gently cradle you cat and lower it into the carrier. Another option is to remove the top half of your carrier while getting the cat to go into the bottom half, and then calmly replace the top as pictured above.
- Use familiar bedding inside the carrier. Consider use of synthetic feline facial pheromone analog spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to transport to help calm the cat.

Keeping the Peace in a Multiple Cat Household

Cats are very sensitive to smells, and unfamiliar scents can result in one cat no longer recognizing another. Aggressive behavior can occur when one cat senses another as a stranger. These suggestions can help avoid problems between cats following a veterinary visit:

- Leave the returning cat in the carrier for a few minutes to see how all of your cats react.
- If all your cats appear calm and peaceful, let the returning cat out of the carrier.
- If you sense tension between cats, or if the previous home-comings have resulted in conflict, keep the cat in the carrier and take it to a separate room to avoid potential injury from and upset cat. Provide food, water and litter box for a minimum of 24 hours while it regains the more familiar smell of home.
- If there is still stress after this time, contact your veterinarian for more advice on slower introduction or medication to help the process.