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TIPS FOR A STRESS-FREE VET VISIT WITH YOUR CAT

Tips for a stress-free vet visit with your cat

Preparing your cat ahead of time will do wonders to reduce or eliminate their anxiety about taking a trip to the clinic.

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Let's face it, most cats aren't leaping at the chance to take a trip to the vet. Their routine gets messed up, they have to endure a car ride, and being around barking dogs is beyond stressful.

We've put together some easy tips to reduce your cat's anxiety and make vet visits a breeze for everyone involved.

Why visiting the vet can be so stressful for cats

Cats are natural-born explorers, but they also like to feel safe and in control. A trip to the vet throws all that out the window. Loud noises at the clinic and strange smells can make any cat grumpy. Being carried around in a crate can, too. These things trigger their "fight-or-flight" instincts.

Proper planning before, during, and after a vet visit can reduce your cat's stress. Here's how to

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make vet visits a little less scary for your feline friend:

Before the appointment

Dog owners know the value of crate-training their canine companions. Many dogs learn to see their crate as a safety zone they can retreat to even when not exposed to stress.

Cats can enjoy carriers, too. Let your kitty get used to a crate at their own pace and they'll soon seek out the snug space on their own. Wondering how to convince your cat to **willingly go into a carrier**? Try the following tips:

- **Start early.** Don't wait until the day of your vet visit to introduce your cat to the carrier, as it can take months for them to accept it. Place the crate in a room where your cat likes to hang out. Prop open or remove the door so your cat isn't closed in.
- **Make the carrier comfy.** Place your cat's favorite bed in the carrier. Entice them with catnip, your cat's favorite toy, or another item they love. A member of the betterpet team has a cat who loves socks, so she leaves an old pair in the carrier.
- **Tempt them with treats.** Cats are food-motivated, so get in the habit of only feeding their favorite between-meal snacks in the carrier. They may be hesitant at first, but they'll realize that going into the carrier is safe and has a reward.
- **Take baby steps.** Give your cat time to get comfortable going into the carrier when they choose. Then, shut the door and leave it closed for a few minutes. After they adjust to that, walk around with the closed carrier. This will help your cat get used to movement.
- **Plan mini-outings.** Once your cat displays no anxiety about being in the crate, take them for a short car ride. Start by going around the block and slowly lengthen your trips. This lets your cat adjust to the idea of going somewhere inside their safe space.
- **Consider medication.** Some cats have anxious personalities and may need help calming down. Spritz the inside of the carrier with a non-prescription pheromone spray like Feliway. Or talk to your vet about using Gabapentin to help your cat tolerate the stress of a clinic visit.

Cats can be trained, as long as you let them move at their own pace. Cats like to be in control! Don't rush the process, be willing to try new items inside the crate to attract your cat, and never shove them inside and slam the door. Patience is key.

During the appointment

Once your cat is fine riding in their crate, it's time to face the next hurdle: the vet's office. The clinic atmosphere can be very scary to your cat. Loud noises, strange smells, and other animals can make even the coolest cat jittery. Here's how to help your kitty stay calm:

- **Find a feline-friendly vet.** Cats-only vets provide as stress-free an experience as possible. Not to mention, there are no barking dogs to worry about!
- **Stay calm.** Cats can pick up on your energy, so remain cool and collected. Talk to your kitty in a soothing voice and pet them gently (if they like it).
- **Provide a safe space.** Keep the carrier door open and let your cat hang out while you wait. During the exam, some cats like to bury their head in your clothing or a soft towel or blanket. Or explore swaddling your cat in a Thundershirt®.

- **Stick by their side.** Research shows that owner separation from their own during exams and treatment causes big increases in [stress in cats](#) . It can also harm vital sign assessments. Insist on being present for most, if not all, of your cat's care.

Even with these calming strategies, the vet visit can still stress your cat. They need time to decompress at home.

After the appointment

Most cats need time to unwind once they are back home. Here's how you can help:

- **Give them time and space.** They might hide for a while. Don't crowd them or try to cuddle right away. Let them relax on their own terms.
- **Separate them from other cats.** Cats want a chance to calm down, and that's not easy to do when the other cats in the household insist on sniffing them. New smells from the vet can make other cats grumpy. Give your kitty a room to themselves for a bit.
- **Don't force food.** It's fine to place a few treats where your cat can find them, but don't push it. They'll eat when they're ready, and you can reward them with their favorite meal then.

Helping your cat process stress before, during, and after a vet appointment builds your bond. It also attends to the emotional needs of your cat. But there are other benefits related to their quality of life that you must keep in mind.

Why it's important to help your cat de-stress for vet appointments

Keeping your cat healthy involves more than feeding them the right diet. You also need to take them to the vet for check-ups. Ignoring stressors can impact their clinical exam or lead to long-term health issues.

They can contribute to your cat developing future behavioral problems, and the fear of causing them stress may cause you to avoid clinic visits entirely. Other impacts could include:

- **Keep medical results in mind.** Anxiety and stress [affect many basic health](#) measurements. A stressed cat tends to have a high temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure. They may also influence test results and increase levels of key hormones, particularly cortisol (the "stress hormone"). These changes make it harder to find medical issues.
- **Avoid behavior issues.** The effects of stressful experiences may influence your cat long after the vet visit is over. Stress is a common factor that leads to behavioral problems. These include peeing in the wrong places or fighting with other cats in the household.

Vet visits are important for keeping your kitty healthy! Less stress at the vet means more cats get the care they need.

Additional tips for a successful vet visit

Here are other tactics to reduce your cat's stress and ensure a successful vet visit.

- **Aim for a quiet time.** Schedule your appointment during the clinic's slowest time of day. The atmosphere is more peaceful then. Don't place the carrier on the ground, which makes the cat feel more vulnerable to other animals.

- **Travel on an empty stomach.** Remove your cat's food and water several hours before the trip. This reduces the chance of them vomiting or going to the bathroom on the way to the clinic.
- **Concentrate on comfort.** Make sure the carrier is warm and comfy. It should also be big enough for your cat to stand up and turn around. Bring spare bedding in case they make a mess in the crate. Spray it with Feliway or another pheromone product.
- **Be careful with the carrier.** Picking up the carrier at both ends rather than by the handle will balance your cat's weight. That prevents the carrier from swinging or hitting things. Place the carrier in the footwell or on the seat (but secure it with a seatbelt).
- **Center yourself.** You don't want your cat to feed off your anxiety. Focus on reducing your stress through meditation, yoga, or whatever works for you. Don't fixate on worst-case scenarios!

Going to the vet with your cat is stressful for you, your cat, and the vet team if you show up with an angry cat! With a little planning, you can reduce or eliminate your cat's anxiety about riding in a crate and experiencing new things. And who knows? You might end up with an **"adventure cat"** who can join you on hikes and other outings!

Frequently asked questions

What are three signs of stress in cats?

Cats that develop a range of new behaviors may be showing signs of stress or illness. Your cat might begin hiding, pacing, or meowing more than they typically do. If your once-calm kitty becomes aggressive to humans or other animals, that can be a sign that something serious is going on. Over-grooming is another common sign indicating it's time to get a veterinary professional involved.

What is a cat-friendly clinic?

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) developed new standards for vets to call themselves a **cat-friendly clinic**. That means they offer a practice that caters only to cats, or exam and waiting rooms set aside for cats. They also may offer specific appointment days and times for felines and employ staff with superior cat handling skills. Best of all, they have more expertise in diagnosing and treating cats for medical issues.

Why do my other cats react aggressively when I bring one home from a vet visit?

Cats rely on scent cues to identify people, places, and animals they are familiar with. If your cat smells different to the other cats in your home, there is likely to be some friction or aggression as they view him as a threat. Vet visits put a lot of new scents on your cat's coat, including new people, other animals, and medications. Also, the scent of stress or fear on the cat can trigger other pets to attack.

Keep them separate for several hours at least. Then, reintroduce them using treats or a group play session. Let them ease back into a harmonious relationship again.

How long does it take for a cat to recover from a vet visit?

You should see your cat return to their normal self within a day or two. Track their eating habits because cats should never go without eating. Fasting for even 48 hours can put them at risk for developing liver problems. Try the stinkiest, strongest-smelling foods to kick-start their desire to eat again. Good choices are sardines, roasted chicken, and Churu treats.