

Tips to Help Your Cat Have a Positive Experience at the Animal Hospital

Prior to the visit:

- Make the carrier a haven by keeping it out in an easily accessible location. A comfortable blanket or familiar clothing from a favourite person placed in the carrier, plus treats or toys will entice the cat to enter on its own. Rewards with treats, food and calm praise will positively reinforce the cats association with the carrier. Once the cat is regularly entering the carrier and using it for resting, begin periodic car rides paired with positive experiences. Bringing toys, blankets, treats and comb if the cat enjoys grooming help make the trip more familiar.
- Travel should be on an empty stomach to prevent motion sickness. This also increases interest in treats during the car ride and at the veterinary hospital, allowing for a more positive experience.
- A synthetic feline pheromone that has a calming effect on the cat can be sprayed in the carrier 30 minutes prior to travel. Draping a blanket over the carrier also helps prevent motion sickness and reduce stress.
- Carriers that provide the option of loading from the top as well as from the front make it easier to get the cat into and out of it in a non-stressful manner. The ideal carrier also allows the top half of the carrier to be removed so that a timid cat can remain in the bottom half during the examination. Additionally, these hard-sided carriers can be easily secured with seat belts.



We understand that cats are often unsure or fearful during a veterinary visit, this is the underlying cause of "misbehaviour". Our designated examination room is equipped with a synthetic feline pheromone diffuser (called Feliway) to help calm anxious cats. It is an ongoing mission to seek methods of improving the experience for our patients.

In the examination room:

- Allow the cat to initiate contact, they are less apprehensive if they have some control over their environment.
- Place the carrier on the floor, then open it's door and allow the cat to sniff or explore the room, catnip or treats placed near the opened door may entice the cat to venture out on its own volition.
- Remove the top half of the carrier if the cat refuses to leave it. Avoid a forced removal as this can be frightening to the patient. *Sliding a towel between the top and bottom halves of the carrier (so the cat is covered) may help reduce anxiety and can be used if swaddling is required.*
- Exam tables may be more accepted by the cat if a familiar blanket or towel from the carrier is placed under the patient.
- Cats will usually cooperate better if allowed to rest in a position that keeps them comfortable. Many enjoy being massaged on the head, behind the ears or under the chin. These are excellent to both distract and calm the cat.
- Cats often feel more secure when leaning against your arm or body.
- Understand the effect of your own anxiety or stress on the cat. Remain calm and reduce any outward display of fear and anxiety. A positive demeanour will help your cat feel less anxious.
- Use a calm quiet voice. Animated discussions may increase anxiety with certain cats.

Returning home:

When cats return home they may carry unfamiliar odours that cause other cats in the home to fail to recognize the returning cat.

- Observe any signs of aggression while the returning cat remains visible inside the carrier. If cats are apprehensive, wait 5-10 minutes.
- Rub the returning cat with an item that carries a familiar scent, such as a towel or blanket that is shared by all cats. The goal is to not only remove foreign odours but make them smell alike. This can be encouraged by rubbing water from canned tuna on your hands and stroking each cat, they should begin both self-grooming and communal grooming, thereby creating a renewal of the family scent. If aggression is displayed between the cats, separate them calmly and carefully.
- If the problem persists, put the patient in a safe, quiet room for 12 - 24 hours until the cats consistently respond to food and toy play from both sides of the door. This allows time to decompress and self-groom (scent removal) promoting a less defensive attitude.
- In some cases, communal feedings or play sessions (this provides an active distraction) are effective but should be closely monitored.

