



Tips for Less Stressful Vet Visits for Your Cat

Just like people, many cats experience anxiety when they visit their doctor—and getting them to the veterinary clinic can be quite an ordeal. The steps outlined below are tips to minimize stress and to help make the visit more pleasant for both you and your cat.

1. Teach Your Cat to Love Her Carrier:

We know that just the mention of the carrier causes a lot of cat owners—and cats—to feel instantly stressed. There's a good chance your cat has been pushed and prodded into this little box, only to be transported to an unfamiliar and scary destination, like the vet or the groomer. No wonder she's terrified! Instead of using her carrier only as a means of transport, start treating it as a kitty refuge. Put comfortable bedding inside and leave it in a place where she likes to hang out (in a sunny spot or in the room where you both like to spend time), so she can rest and relax in it whenever she likes. Offer food and treats in the carrier to show her that good things happen when she's inside. After all, many cats already prefer sleeping in small spaces, so there's a good chance she'll enjoy hanging out in a carrier.

2. Practice Going on Car Rides:

Once your cat learns to love her crate, you can teach her to love the car. This is a gradual process: Place your crated cat in the car with the car door open, give her a high-value treat, and then take the carrier out of the car. Do this several times. Once your cat seems comfortable, you can close the car door and then open it again. Next, you can turn the car on then off. Eventually, you'll work your way up to driving short distances like around the block, and your cat will learn that the car isn't so scary after all—and an easy way to get yummy treats!

3. Spray Pheromones:

Synthetic pheromones like Feliway are like a relaxing feline perfume. Spray them inside your kitty's crate and spritz some on a towel to drape over the top to act as a curtain (so she won't see unfamiliar and stressful sights such as dogs in the waiting room or the inside of your car). Take some to the veterinary office with you to spray in the exam room. Synthetic pheromones won't work on all cats, but it's a safe option worth trying. We love this product and use it regularly at our clinic.

4. Establish a Waiting Room Strategy:

The waiting room can be a cat's worst nightmare. It might be filled with strange dogs, cats, and humans. Instead of waiting inside, ask our staff if it is OK for you to wait in the car with your cat until the exam room is ready (as long as it's not too hot or cold in your car). If that's not an option, make sure you cover her carrier with a towel so she can't see anything in the waiting room that may cause her stress. We are happy to keep your cat on a counter top behind our front desk if there are dogs in the lobby, too.

5. Train Her to Tolerate Being Handled:

During an exam, your vet will check your cat from head to tail. Some cats may not appreciate having a stranger touch them. Ideally, you should teach your cat to tolerate being handled while she's still a kitten, but she can still learn as an adult. Just like the car ride, the trick is to dole out plenty of treats and praise during the entire process! Practice holding and picking her up the right way, and ask friends to do the same. She'll probably protest the most when you handle her paws. Have plenty of treats ready, and take small steps at a time. Build her tolerance to paw handling by holding each of her paws and gently pressing on each toe. This will be especially helpful when you need to trim her nails.

Zen Kitty Tips

-  Take each step *slowly*—patience is key!
-  Be generous and timely with treats, praise, toys, and games! Whatever the reward, make it high-value.
-  Many cats benefit from sedatives. No need to let stress scare you and your cat away from proper veterinary care!



6. Reward Good Behavior:

Please do not feed your cat in the morning before a vet visit so that she will be extra interested in our treats at the clinic. Focus on rewarding your cat when she does something good—no matter how small or insignificant it seems. Did she sniff her carrier? Give her a treat or praise her with affection (if those are things she likes). Did she make the trip in the car without hissing? That deserves a reward, too. The goal is to help your cat form a positive association with every step—from before and during the visit to the trip home. It won't happen overnight, but it's not as difficult as you may think. Be patient!

7. Sedation:

For some cats, no amount of treats and praise will make them change their tune when it comes to vet visits. If your cat is particularly anxious, your vet may recommend an oral sedative for you to give 1-2 hours before the appointment. This is a great way to take the edge off and can help make it a much more pleasant experience for owners and cats alike. Don't let your cat's anxiety stop you from scheduling regular veterinary exams—your cat's health is too important to risk!

Please see the following link for helpful videos about creating a less stressful vet visit:
http://www.catalystcouncil.org/resources/health_welfare/cat_friendly_practices/

Based on content courtesy of VetStreet