

How to create **low-stress** veterinary visits for cats

The ominous hissing, the mournful meows, the defensive scratching or biting, the upset bowels—feline stress is just plain unpleasant for cats and you. Many cats get stressed when it's time for a veterinary visit. Thankfully, there are ways to help cats relax and enjoy the ride—yes, even in the car. Here's what you can do.

1 Transport your cat in a carrier

Putting cats in a carrier on the way to and from the veterinary clinic is extremely important. Cats are often startled by loud noises or other pets, and, if you're carrying your cat in your hands, you might not be able to hold on if it abruptly tries to get away. Also, cats that are allowed to roam freely inside the car face the risk of more severe injury should there be an accident.

2 Choose a hard-plastic carrier with a removable top

Some cats might resist being put into a carrier. But removable tops make getting cats into—and out of—the carrier easier. Simply undo the screws or latches, lift off the top, set the cat in the bottom, and replace the top. This eliminates the need to force the cat inside, which makes the cat—and you—more relaxed.

3 Make the carrier a favorite place

Some cats come to love their carriers. When cats see their carriers as safe, enjoyable places, they're happy to go into them and feel more safe in scary places, like the car. Use these strategies to create crate-fondness in your cat:

- Leave the carrier out in your house so your cat can access it at any time.
- Make the carrier inviting by putting a favorite blanket or toy in it.
- Every now and then, lay a few treats inside the carrier.

4 Head to the veterinary clinic for “happy visits”

Does your cat seem to bristle at the thought of visiting the veterinarian? Then take it on a few stress-free trial runs. Call the veterinary clinic to ask if the schedule would allow you and your cat to stop in for five or 10 minutes. You won't be making a medical visit, but rather a mock appointment that allows your cat to experience all the steps of a routine visit without the physical examination. This free-of-charge “happy visit” gives your cat the chance to get used to the sounds and smells of the clinic, meet the veterinary team members, and eat a few treats all while enjoying the safety of its carrier. After some canoodling, you and your cat will head back home.

If a car ride alone puts your cat in a tailspin, entice your cat into its carrier and start by going for a test drive around the block. Continue to take a drive every now and then, gradually increasing the amount of time you and your cat spend in the car. Remember to reward your cat with a treat for being a good passenger. Eventually, you'll work your way up to doing a drive that will allow you and your cat to make a “happy visit.” Positive reinforcement is the best way to modify feline behavior, so making car rides and veterinary visits pleasant will help decrease your cat's anxiety.