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PETS

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## Training cats can cut stress of vet visits

If your cats are anything like mine, going to visit the vet is not something they enjoy. My female cat, Keiki, meows a bit when she first gets in the carrier,



DR. ELAINE WEXLER-MITCHELL  
THE CAT DOC

and my male, Shaka, sings to me during the entire car ride. His complaining stops once he enters the clinic and he knows he will have to stay for a bit.

Cats don't like changes and unpredictability in their environments, so putting them in a carrier and then taking them out of their homes creates stress. There are several things that help to make a veteri-

ary visit more pleasant for your cat.

A cat carrier is a must for any travel outside of your home. Even the most gentle and calm cat can become startled and bolt in unfamiliar conditions. We urge every client to bring their cat to our clinic in a carrier, and despite our warnings, several times a year we chase cats around the parking lot when they escape from their owner's arms.

There are numerous styles of carriers, but I prefer the soft-sided ones that can open from the top or the front. This allows several options for quietly removing the cat. Be sure that the zippers or latches are easy to use and are tightly secured once the cat is inside. Try putting treats or toys inside so that your cat sees the carrier as a safe and friendly place.

There are some tricks to getting your cat into his carrier. If you cannot simply open the top and place him in, place the carrier on end and carefully drop him in. As funny as it seems, using a pillow case with very frightened cats can be effective.

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Your cat should never be shaken out of his carrier. This scares the cat and increases the stress of the visit. If your cat doesn't walk out on his own, open the top or remove the screws or clips to remove him.

For most cats, the only time they get placed in a carrier and driven in a car

is for a visit to the vet. You can try to desensitize your cat to travel by putting him in his carrier and taking him on other short car trips. This training method works best with young cats.

Many cats get car sick, so traveling on an empty stomach is recommended.

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Do not feed your cat for a couple of hours before leaving your home.

You can bring your cat's favorite toys or treats with you to his vet visit, but he may not enjoy them as he would at home. It is worth a try. I often try to bribe cats with treats after good visits or as distractions, but it's

not always successful.

One of the most important things you can do to make your cat's vet visit easier is start working with your kitten at home and practice combing, nail trimming and even tooth brushing weekly or every few weeks.

The more your cat is used to being handled and touched, the more relaxed he will be with strangers doing the same.

The next part of training is "playing vet" at home with your cat. You should regularly touch your cat's face, ears, feet and tail. Have your vet show you how to open your cat's mouth. If you practice this at home, medicating your cat if he ever gets sick is much easier.

Despite these suggestions, there are some cats that have their minds made

up and will absolutely not relax or cooperate with travel or a vet exam. In these cases oral or injectable tranquilizers are needed. If you are the owner of a cat like this, do consider drugs that will allow the cat to be calm and less likely to hurt himself or others. The cat is happier with sedation, and the veterinary staff can do a better and more thorough job of handling him.

Cats and kittens can be trained, but you have to be willing to put in the time. Getting routine health care and having regular veterinary exams will help keep him as healthy as possible, so don't be afraid of taking your cat to the vet.

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