










# Getting Your Cat in the Carrier for Your Next Vet Exam

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**DO YOU DREAD** taking your cat to the veterinarian? Does your cat vanish the minute you remove the carrier from the closet? After wrestling your cat into the carrier, does she wail like a banshee all the way to the veterinarian? It doesn't need to be this way. With time and patience, you can make a trip to the vet a much more pleasant experience for you both.

## Habituating your Cat to a Carrier

-  Begin by leaving the carrier open in the house and available to the cat at all times. Put it in the room where you spend a lot of time (ex. living room).
-  During this time, never close the door on the carrier. Take the door off (if you can) or wire or prop it open to be sure that it doesn't accidentally close and startle her.
-  Feed your cat near the carrier. If at first she won't eat near the carrier, move the food bowl as far away as necessary to get her to eat. You can even make this easier by adding some special tasty treat to the food bowl, such as a bite of canned tuna or chicken; whatever your cat finds really special. (see suggestions on back).
-  Once your cat regularly eats from the bowl, begin moving the bowl a few inches closer to the carrier every few days until she will eat next to the carrier.
-  After the cat has eaten next to the carrier for several days, place the food bowl directly inside the carrier entrance so she only has to place her head inside the carrier to eat.
-  After several days of eating food with just her head inside the carrier, move the bowl further into the carrier, a few inches every day until she is eating completely inside the carrier. When practicing any of these steps, if your cat suddenly begins refusing food, this means you have moved too fast and she is uncomfortable. Stop the procedure, take a few steps back to where your cat was eating food and proceed more slowly.
-  Place her favorite toys and an occasional treat into the carrier and allow the cat to find them there. Stuffed mice, catnip toys, feather toys, or some cat grass are all good choices to lure your kitty into the carrier to relax inside for a few moments. Spraying a synthetic feline facial pheromone, **such as Feliway®**, in the carrier may also help.
-  After several weeks (maybe even months, depending on the cat) you should find her occasionally resting in the carrier and using it as any other favorite sleeping area. At this stage you can begin closing the door for a few seconds at a time with her inside. Start by closing the door 10 seconds today, 15 seconds tomorrow, 20 seconds the day after that, and so on. Keep a close eye on her, if she ever acts distressed about being in the carrier with the door closed, release her immediately. And next time you close the door, only leave it closed as long as the cat had tolerated it on the previous session.
-  Once your cat uses the carrier regularly as a resting place, if you want to take the time, you can proceed to habituating the cat to car rides using a methodical, slow initiation process.

## Did you know?

**38%**

of cat owners get stressed just thinking about taking their cat to the veterinarian.<sup>1</sup>

**52%**

of cats haven't had a veterinary check up in the past year.<sup>1</sup>

**1 in 3**

cat owners say their cat is unwilling to get in a carrier.<sup>2</sup>



### Does this look familiar?

Don't rush your cat. Take your time with each step because luring your cat into her carrier for a trip to the veterinarian may exacerbate her fear of the carrier, which could lead to her distrust in you. You've made a lot of progress at this point, keep going and don't give up.

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Feliway® is a synthetic copy of a feline facial pheromone that cat's use to mark territory.

Feliway® Spray has been clinically proven to help reduce the signs of stress some cats experience during travel including vomiting, agitation, meowing, salivation, urination and defecation.\*

Feliway® Spray has also been clinically proven to reduce the signs of stress during veterinary exams. In addition to helping reduce the stress the cat is feeling, it also helps make examinations easier for the veterinary team.\*\*

Feliway® Spray is available in a 20 ml and 60 ml size.

To use, spray 8-10 pumps in the cat carrier, on bedding, in the car, etc and wait 15 minutes before introducing the cat. Effects last 4-5 hours, reapply as necessary. Never spray directly on the cat.

\*Gaultier P, Pageat P, Tessier Y. Effect of a feline pheromone analogue on manifestations of stress in cats during transport. Proc of the 32nd Cong of the Int'l Soc for Appl Ethology. France, 1998.

\*\* J. S. Pereira, S. Fragoso, S. Lavigne, A. Beck, A.S. Varejão, G. da Graça Pereira. Feliway® spray assessment to handle stress in cats in veterinary consultation. Proceedings of the 2014 International Congress on Semiochemistry and Management of Animal Populations, Apt, France, Nov 2014; pp 89-90.



### **A Cat-Friendly Carrier**

A carrier with a variety of openings (top opening and both ends) is ideal for a veterinary visit. This way, the veterinarian can remove parts of the carrier to examine the cat, and often without having to move the cat at all. This makes a more comfortable experience for the cat because they can stay within the perceived safety of the carrier.

At this point, an occasional trip to the vet may still be a bit stressful, but as long as the carrier remains associated with some good things in the cat's life, not only trips to the veterinary clinic, it will remain easier to take the cat to the veterinarian and the cat will be less stressed upon arrival.

When your cat is less stressed, the veterinarian will be able to perform a more thorough physical exam, increasing the chance of catching medical conditions early, in their most treatable or manageable state. The cat that can receive timely, stress free examinations is more likely to receive regular preventive care and have the greatest chance of living the longest, healthiest life possible.

### **Tempting Food Rewards for Your Cat**

Many cats can be finicky about new foods. Finding the right, tempting treat is a necessity for rewarding the cat when she makes choices that you like, such as resting in her crate.

#### **Treats to Try:**

Low-fat cream cheese | Low-fat whipping cream | String cheese | Boiled or canned chicken or turkey | Canned tuna | Baby food (chicken or beef) | Commercially produced treats for cats, such as dehydrated salmon.

Identify the treat your cat likes by first offering it in non-threatening situations, such as around meal times or play times or when petting your cat and giving her attention.

**Dr. Valarie Tynes** is a Board Certified Veterinary Behaviorist and has served on the Board of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists for the past 6 years. She is a nationally recognized speaker and author on behavior and has been offering behavioral consultations for more than 15 years. She currently works for Ceva Animal Health, as a Veterinary Services Specialist. She and her husband live on a ranch in Texas with a menagerie of pets.

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<sup>1</sup>Volk, JO, Thomas JG, Collieran, EJ. Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study: Feline Findings. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc., Vol 244, No. 7, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>Feliway Brand Equity Study, 2014.