



Help Your Cat Love the Carrier

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WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Did you know that cats outnumber dogs as pets in the U.S. by about 5 million? Yet, about half as many cats as dogs see their veterinarian. Cats are masters at hiding illnesses and need regular (at least yearly) exams to help keep them healthy and happy. One reason cats don't visit the veterinarian regularly is because traveling can be stressful—for both you and your cat. But it doesn't have to be that way. Follow these tips to help your feline friend love her carrier.

TYPES OF CARRIERS

Soft-sided carriers may appear more comfortable but hard plastic carriers are safer. Regardless of the type you choose, make sure to get one that opens at the top as well as the side. This allows you to more easily place your cat into and get her out of the carrier, without having to shove her in or drag her out—not a pleasant way to start a veterinary visit! Also consider buying one that has an easily removable top, giving the veterinarian the option of performing the exam or treatment while your cat remains in the familiar bottom part of the carrier.

THE CARRIER IS A GREAT PLACE TO BE!

If your cat only sees the carrier when it's time for a veterinary visit, then you likely won't find your cat when you bring out the carrier. It's time to change your cat's perception of the carrier from one of fear and dread to a more pleasant sense of comfort and security.

- Make the carrier accessible at all times.
- Place a comfy blanket or towel inside, and leave toys and treats in there, too.
- Feed your cat her meals inside the carrier. If she is already wary of the carrier, then start by feeding her farther away from it and gradually (over several days or weeks) move the food closer.
- Eventually move the food just inside the carrier. Make sure the door won't accidentally shut on her.
- Slowly move the food farther inside until your cat has to go all the way in to eat.
- Once she is comfortable eating in the carrier, close the door for a second or two and then open it right away.
- Gradually lengthen the time your cat is in the carrier with the door closed, but make sure she continues to eat. If she stops eating, this is a sign that she's not comfortable, so back up a step.

- Once your cat is happily eating in the carrier with the door closed, lift the carrier and walk around a little with her inside. Do this for a few days.
- Next, place her in the car. Offer extra yummy treats for this step. Do this for a few days.
- Then turn the car on and drive around the block while she eats in the carrier. Repeat this as often as possible and go on longer drives.
- Take her to the veterinary hospital for a “happy visit,” during which she gets only treats, petting and playtime. (Call ahead to make sure the hospital is not too busy.)

While proceeding through the steps above, watch your cat’s reaction carefully. You may be able to skip some steps if she’s handling all these new experiences well, or you may need to break things down into even smaller steps if she becomes worried at any point.

It may seem like work but training your cat to like her carrier only takes a few minutes per session and is well worth it in the end. Reducing the stress of travel means your cat can get the medical care she needs to be a cherished member of your family for many years to come!