



**Paw Prints**

**Resource sheet:**

## **Get your cat ready for veterinary visits**

### **Why does my cat hate going to the vet?**

Cats are known to dislike visiting the veterinary clinic. Is it just “because they’re cats”? We don’t think so. Many cats can be just as comfortable as dogs in veterinary clinics if you take a little care with them.

Stress is cumulative. From the carrier, to the car, to the lobby, to the exam room, everything that happens affects how cats react once they are on the table. Visiting the veterinary clinic must be like being beamed into an alien spaceship to many pets, especially cats.

How would you react if you were awakened from a cozy sleep in a sunny spot, wrestled into a cage, carried to a noisy vehicle, and driven over nausea-inducing terrain to a building that smells and sounds nothing like home?

Once you arrive, you’re trapped as large, salivating dogs snuffle and slurp the outside of your tiny cage. Small dogs bark fearfully and growl menacingly at you.

Inside an exam room, you are peeled, protesting, from the inside of your cage, plopped onto a slippery, plastic scale, and slid onto a cold, metal table. Strangers poke and prod you, leaving no orifice untouched. If you show fear by hissing, growling or swatting, you may be muzzled, pinned, netted, scruffed or otherwise immobilized.

Imagine if your visits to the doctor, or your child’s visit to the pediatrician, were like that!

### **What about the car ride?**

Cats don’t often go places in cars, so the motion and noises of cars may be startling to your cat. Some cats can get used to car travel if you occasionally take them places (short trips, literally just around the block). If the trip doesn’t end at the veterinary clinic, your cat may decide that car rides aren’t so bad.

Did you know cats can get carsick? If your cat throws up in her carrier, talk to our veterinarians. We may be able to give you medication to help prevent carsickness.

### **Improving your cat’s experience at the clinic**

In the lobby, rest the carrier on the table or your lap, not the floor, so that your cat doesn’t feel so vulnerable. Once in the room, we’ll give your cat time to relax and leave the carrier on her own. If she’s nervous, we’ll take the top off and leave her securely in the bottom for the exam. We also provide blankets and towels for uncertain cats to hide under. A warm, nonslip mat on the table will help her feel secure. Gentle and slow handling helps cats to warm up to us quickly. We can usually avoid scruff holds and severe restraint when patients have time to relax.

### **Extra help for scared and/or aggressive cats**

If your cat has become aggressive to you or clinic staff at past visits, consider Feliway or Anxitaine.

Feliway is a pheromone spray that calms anxious cats. A quick mist into or around the carrier (not into the cat’s face) can help your cat relax.

Anxitaine is an inexpensive, chewable treat that reduces anxiety in cats and dogs. Giving a dose about an hour before leaving home may help your cat relax for the entire experience. Note: Anxitaine is not a sedative; it will not make your cat sleepy or lethargic.

Ask our staff if you’d like to try Feliway or Anxitaine for your next visit.

### **Consider scheduling a short session with our behaviorist**

We offer in-clinic and in-home behavioral consultations for a range of cat behavior problems. We can help you teach your cat to tolerate nail trims, injections and other aspects of handling. We can also help you address more serious issues like litterbox problems, aggression between pets in the home, aggression toward people, and more.

**See also: our information sheet on how to get your cat more comfortable going into the carrier.**

### **For creatures great and small...**

Excellent veterinary medicine must address stress and behavior as critical components of care. Ask our behaviorist, doctors or staff for more information about how we integrate behavior and low-stress handling into everything we do.