

10 THINGS THAT MAKE FEAR FREE VETERINARY VISITS DIFFERENT

FEAR FREE HAPPY HOMES

Helping pets live happy, healthy, full lives



What do we mean when we say that a veterinary visit is Fear Free? A veterinary team member who is Fear Free Certified® wants your pet to be happy when he comes through the door of the clinic.

Fear Free doesn't mean that your pet will never experience anything uncomfortable at the veterinarian—he may be injured or ill, after all—but it does mean that we make every effort to reduce any fear, anxiety, and stress related to examinations and procedures. Here are 10 ways we help your pet stay comfortable and relaxed from arrival to departure.

- ⊗ **The waiting game is over.** You can expect to have a species-specific waiting area (no dogs invading your cat's private space), be given the option of waiting in your car with your pet until you are texted or called to come in, or be taken right into the exam room.
- ⊗ **No more sitting on slick, cold surfaces.** Your pet will have a nonslip surface to stand on, such as a yoga mat or a warm, pheromone-infused towel.
- ⊗ **Relaxation rules.** Pheromone and aromatherapy diffusers emit calming substances into the air, and pet-friendly music works its calming effect on the central nervous system. (You might benefit, too.)
- ⊗ **Eye contact is for you, not your pet.** Fear Free Certified® veterinary team members will initially avoid eye contact with your pet and focus on you instead. This helps your pet feel less stressed because he's not the center of attention and gives him time to check out his environment and become accustomed to the team member's presence.
- ⊗ **Got treats?** Bring your dog or cat in hungry because Fear Free Certified® veterinary team members will be handing out many small but delicious treats throughout the visit to welcome your pet, distract him from procedures, and reward him for cooperation.
- ⊗ **Color therapy.** Bright white can be startling to animals. Pastels are more soothing, so veterinary professionals wear lab coats and scrubs in those shades.
- ⊗ **Playing doctor.** In addition to treats, our veterinary team members utilize a variety of distraction techniques, such as toys, to help your pet be comfortable.
- ⊗ **"The back" is out.** Whenever possible, our Fear Free Certified® veterinary team members will perform exams and procedures right there in the exam room so your pet will be reassured by your presence and you can assist as needed, and you'll have the assurance that he will be treated kindly and respectfully.
- ⊗ **A little extra help?** If needed, we will prescribe anti-anxiety or other calming medications or supplements to help make the car ride and the visit more enjoyable and less frightening for your pet.
- ⊗ **Emotional rescue.** Our veterinary team members will note your pet's emotional response to the visit and what treats and techniques worked best to reduce any fear, anxiety, and stress that may have been expressed. This will help to make future visits even better.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PET FOR A VETERINARY VISIT

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Preparing for the visit

- 🐾 **Hungry is good.** If medically appropriate, reduce the amount of food your pet eats before a veterinary visit. This can help prevent nausea with car travel as well as make the treats at the veterinary visit more appealing.
- 🐾 **Treat bonanza.** Bring 50 to 100 of your pet's favorite treats but in tiny amounts. Cut them up if necessary. Your pet likes a variety of treats? Bring an assortment! Even your cat's canned food might do the trick. Treats should be no larger than half a pea or a single lick. You might not use all of them, but it is better to have too many than not enough.
- 🐾 **Favorite toys, and a grooming brush.** Bring some familiar items your pet likes. This will help your pet relax in the veterinary hospital. The veterinary team may ask you to use these items to help distract your pet during the visit.
- 🐾 **Towel, shirt, blanket, or bed sprayed with species-specific calming pheromones or lavender.** Commercially available calming pheromones can help promote relaxation. The scent of lavender has been shown to have a calming effect on dogs during car travel. An item that smells like home, such as a blanket your pet sleeps on or a t-shirt you've worn can also provide comfort for your pet. For dogs, consider spraying a bandana with a calming pheromone and placing it on your dog's neck. When you use pheromone sprays, allow the pheromone to dry for 10 to 15 minutes before exposing your pet to the sprayed item.
- 🐾 **Make sure your pet is acclimated to a carrier, crate, or seatbelt harness and is not stressed by travel confinement.**
- 🐾 **Provide your pet with an opportunity to relieve himself prior to leaving your home and again before you go into the clinic.** Nothing escalates stress more than having a full bladder or colon and no access to a bathroom.
- 🐾 **Budget plenty of time to avoid being rushed.** If you are stressed, your pet will be too.
- 🐾 **If your veterinarian has prescribed any anti-nausea or anti-anxiety supplements or medications, make sure to give them as prescribed.**
- 🐾 **Talk to your veterinarian if you think anti-nausea or anti-anxiety supplements or medications would help your pet have a more pleasant veterinary experience.**

Acclimating your cat or dog to travel confinement.

Make sure your pet is comfortable with confinement for travel. Carriers for cats and small dogs or crates or seatbelt harnesses for medium-size to large dogs are safe options for car travel. Use yummy treats to condition your dog to wearing a seatbelt harness. Keep the carrier/crate out in commonly used areas of the house at all times and incorporate some of these techniques to create a carrier/crate oasis: put your pet's favorite toys or bedding near or in the carrier/crate; play with your pet near the carrier/crate; place a pheromone-infused towel or bed or an object of clothing permeated with your scent inside the confinement area; place treats, catnip (for our feline friends), or a rubber food puzzle toy with canned food inside the carrier; and feed your pet in or near the carrier/crate. Let your pet enter on his/her own. You can teach your pet to enter the carrier/crate on cue to earn a food reinforce, or toss a treat or toy into the carrier/crate. Need help? Ask your veterinarian who he or she recommends for Fear Free training.

HOW TO MAKE THE TRIP TO THE VETERINARY HOSPITAL FEAR FREE

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- 🐾 Your pet should voluntarily go into a carrier or crate or wear a seatbelt harness. Give any prescribed anti-nausea or anti-anxiety supplements or medications as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- 🐾 Cats should be resting comfortably in their carrier before being placed in the vehicle. Walk dogs to the car on leash. Like cats, small dogs can get in the carrier indoors and be carried to the car.
- 🐾 When transporting your cat or small dog in a carrier, minimize movement. If possible, support the carrier from the bottom, with one side resting against your chest, as if you are carrying a fragile gift. This helps your pet to feel more secure and ensures that he isn't eye to eye with other animals as you walk into the lobby of the veterinary hospital.
- 🐾 Prepare the car so it promotes a calming environment.
 - ✓ Play calming music specially composed for cats and dogs, or pop in an audiobook.
 - ✓ Apply calming pheromones or scents such as lavender. 6 to 8 sprays of a calming pheromone or 2 or 3 sprays of a diluted lavender scent will suffice. Apply 10 to 15 minutes before your pet enters the carrier or car.
 - ✓ Cool or warm the car to a comfortable temperature before putting your pet inside.
- 🐾 Carrier/crate is properly secured in the vehicle
 - ✓ Nonslip surface in and under carrier/crate or on the car seat.
 - ✓ Place a pheromone-infused towel or blanket over the carrier, leaving one side uncovered for ventilation.
 - ✓ The floorboard behind the passenger seat is the most secure location for a small pet carrier.
 - ✓ Secure large crates or carriers to prevent sliding.
- 🐾 Avoid feeling rushed. If you are stressed, your pet will sense this and may become stressed.
- 🐾 To prevent carsickness, accelerate slowly from a stop, allow extra distance between other vehicles to prevent sudden braking, and take turns slowly.
- 🐾 Be matter of fact, and don't speak to your pet in a sing-song voice. If you are calm, happy and relaxed, your pet will be, too.
- 🐾 Cats need five to ten minutes to adjust to their new surroundings and feel safe. If you cannot avoid waiting in the lobby, place your cat's carrier on an elevated surface & cover the front and two sides with a pheromone-infused towel. Depending on your dog's preferences, you might wait in the vehicle, take a short walk, or wait in the lobby.

Notify the veterinary hospital team when you arrive. Rather than bringing your pet into the veterinary hospital, call the front desk and let them know you are in the parking lot. They can call or text you when the exam room is ready.