



Paw Prints

Resource sheet:

Teach your cat to like the carrier

Is your cat hard to get into the carrier? Does he always seem to know when you're planning to take him somewhere?

Cats can quickly associate carriers with fear and pain, and it can be difficult (even dangerous) to force a cat into a carrier. To avoid traumatizing your cat, and to prevent bites and scratches to family members, consider spending some time to get your cat comfortable going into the carrier on her own.

1. Bring the carrier into a room used frequently by family members, and open the door (or remove it). You will be leaving the carrier in this room permanently, so pick a spot that the cat likes.
2. Put cozy blankets inside, toys and treats.
3. A few times a day, toss treats into the carrier and walk away. It doesn't matter if the cat doesn't go in, or show interest in the carrier. It may take a week or two before the cat is trusting enough to investigate the carrier.
4. Continue to put toys and treats into the carrier and allow your cat freedom to come and go into the carrier as she pleases.
5. Once the cat seems fully comfortable with the carrier (usually evidenced by sleeping or hanging out inside the carrier), you can start to go over and pet him while he's in the carrier.
6. Work up gradually to putting the food bowl near the carrier, and then into the carrier. Start the bowl just outside the carrier and move it inch by inch into the carrier. If the cat is not eating from the bowl, you are moving too quickly. This can take a while.
7. Start closing the door for a second or two and then opening it again, and giving a treat. When the cat is comfortable with you closing the door, you can start to latch it.
8. On the day you are scheduled to come to the clinic, put a small amount of food into the bowl. Put the bowl into the carrier and wait for the cat to go in to eat. Quietly and calmly close and latch the carrier door. Allow the cat to continue eating before picking up the carrier.
9. Remember that your cat is inside the carrier, and small motions or bumps can be a big deal. Handle the carrier in a steady, careful manner, and talk quietly to your cat to soothe him.

A note about carriers: It's a good idea to make sure your cat's carrier is able to be opened from the top and at least one side. Cats do best if they can walk in and out of their carrier. If a cat is nervous about leaving the carrier in an exam room, a top opening can allow the doctor to soothe your cat and start a partial exam before he is out of the carrier. We are always happy to take apart a hard-sided carrier to remove the top, so that your cat can feel safe and comfortable in the bottom half.

See also: our information sheet on how to get your cat more comfortable coming to the clinic.

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.