

YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND:

ACCLIMATING YOUR CAT TO A CARRIER

Cats can be such sweet cuddly babies...until they're not. Trying to get a cat into a carrier can be an upsetting task for everyone as the cat extends all her sharp parts in protest of the dreaded box. But it doesn't need to be so bad! It just takes a little consistency and training to get your cat comfortable with her carrier.

Don't store the carrier out of sight and only bring it out when it's time for a vet visit. This will create negative associations for your cat. Instead:

- At least two weeks before your vet visit, wash and dry the carrier so it doesn't smell "weird".
- Leave the carrier in plain sight with the door open so your cat can investigate on her own.
- Put a blanket, towel, or cat bed that your cat already likes and uses inside the carrier.
- Add some of your cat's favorite toys to make it extra comforting.
- Put her food and water dishes next to the carrier so she has to be near it and gradually becomes more comfortable. Eventually, you can try moving her dishes inside the carrier.

Following these steps will help your cat become desensitized to the carrier. You might even find her taking a nap in there, all on her own! If your cat is treat-motivated (many are!), you can try leading her in the carrier with a treat and then rewarding her once she's inside.

If your cat is still reluctant to go in the carrier, try these steps to get her safely inside her carrier:

- Set the carrier on its end so the opening faces the ceiling and the door is open.
- Wrap your cat in a towel, gently enough so that her breathing is not restricted, but firmly enough so that her legs are confined.
- Quickly place your swaddled cat in the carrier and close the door. The towel will come off on its own so don't worry about removing it.

Some cat carriers are better than others, too. If this method is too difficult with a carrier with a small opening, you can try a larger carrier or one with a top door in addition to the front door.

Once your cat is in the carrier, try these tips to keep her calm on her car ride:

- Spray cat calming spray (like Feliway or similar) inside the carrier.
- If possible, take her on short practice rides before the day-of event.
- Cover her carrier with a towel so she is not overstimulated by outside activities.
- Talk to her gently or play soothing music while you drive.

Getting her out of the carrier after you've arrived can be a little stressful. Ideally, you will be in an enclosed exam room. Open the door and put one hand on her head to keep her facing away from you. Then, wrap your other arm around her and scoop her out gently. If she is anxious or upset, she may need to be scruffed for safety—gently grab the back of her neck as you pull her out and then tuck her between your body and your arm. If she's very upset, she may need to be wrapped up in the towel again.

As with all things, practice and consistency help make an anxious situation much better! If possible, leave her carrier out as a permanent house fixture. Take her on a short car rides every few weeks and reward her for a job well done.

