

Cat carriers

Carriers provide safety for both client and cat during transport,²⁴ and often give a cat a sense of security by being hidden in a secure, closed container. Surveys are ongoing to determine the best attributes of carriers. They should, however, be sturdy, secure and stable for the cat, easy for the client to carry, and quiet so that opening the carrier does not startle the cat. Some cats like to see out, whereas others are less anxious when covered. The design should permit easy removal of the cat if it will not come out on its own, or should allow the cat to be easily examined in the bottom of its carrier. A removable top is useful for fearful and fear-aggressive cats, as well as for sick, painful or limited-mobility cats.

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A variety of carrier styles exist, such as this one which zips open, allowing the cat to be slowly exposed, as appropriate, while it remains on its own bedding. *Courtesy of Dr Anne-Claire Gagnon*



A more conventional carrier, with removable top and front. *Courtesy of Dr Sophia Yin*

Training the cat to use the carrier

The goal is for the cat to learn to associate the carrier with positive experiences and routinely enter it voluntarily. Make the carrier a familiar part of furniture at home, with soft bedding for comfort. If the cat responds favorably to treats, catnip and/or toys, place these in the open carrier as positive reinforcement to encourage the cat to enter the carrier at home. Some owners may find it helpful to train the cat to enter the carrier using a word or clicker as a cue. Individual cats respond differently to treats; use them if that makes the cat less stressed or anxious.



Relaxed kitty, with a favorite toy! *Courtesy of Dr Ilana Rodan*

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Getting an unwilling cat into the carrier

If the cat has not been accustomed to the carrier at the time a veterinary visit is imminent, plan a strategy that will work with the type of carrier and the home environment. Putting the carrier in a small room with few hiding places may encourage the cat to choose the carrier. Consider use of a synthetic feline facial pheromone (FFP) analog spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to transport to help calm the cat. Open the carrier and place familiar bedding, a toy and/or treat inside. Encourage the cat to enter the carrier voluntarily. Do not chase the cat to get it into the carrier. If needed, remove the top of the carrier while encouraging the cat to go into the bottom tray, then calmly replace the top.

Transporting the carrier in a vehicle

Prior to any scheduled veterinary visit, practice lifting the carrier and getting it in and out of the car. Try this first without the cat, to be sure that there isn't too much jostling or knocking of the carrier, and then with the cat inside. During travel secure the carrier by placing it on the floor or by using a seatbelt, because a moving carrier can frighten the cat. Placing a towel over the carrier can prevent visual arousal.

Carrier secured with a seatbelt. *Courtesy of Dr Eliza Sundahl*

