



How to make regular Vet visits less Stressful

According to the AVMA's Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook, dog owners have a higher likelihood of seeking veterinary care than do owners of cats. Is this because cats have fewer medical needs or need less preventative care? Not at all. As a matter of fact, findings from a study conducted by Bayer HealthCare and The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), show that:

- More than half of owned cats (52 percent) hadn't been to the vet within the past year.
- Older cats see vets less often than younger cats do, when in fact the current recommendation for older cats (age 15+) according to Tufts University, is 3 times/year, and cats 11-15 years old, should see a vet twice a year.
- 95 percent of veterinarians believe cats should receive annual checkups, and 72 percent believe that wellness exams are the most important service we provide.
- Only about half as many cats get annual checkups as dogs.

The study "confirms that we treat cats differently than dogs when it comes to caring for their health, in part because cats are so effective at masking signs of illness and injury," said Ian Spinks, president and general manager of Bayer HealthCare's North American Animal Health Division, based in Shawnee, Kan. "Since only half as many cats get annual checkups as dogs, Bayer is working with the American Association of Feline Practitioners to get the word out that cats need regular veterinary care, too."

A cat's personality plays a role in its veterinary care. The study found that 81 percent of cat owners believed that cats are very self-sufficient and independent and therefore require little attention. "Cats' independent nature makes them appear more standoffish than dogs, and they keep secrets by often hiding signs of illness," said Cristiano von Simson, DVM, MBA, director of veterinary services at Bayer's Animal Health Division. "The study showed that 81 percent of owners believe their cat was in excellent health, while 53 percent said their cat had never been sick or injured. These perceptions help account for why cats visit the veterinarian less. Dog owners already consider visits to the veterinarian part of responsible pet ownership. It should be that way for cats, too."

As for habitat, the study revealed that 63 percent of cats in cat-only households live indoors exclusively and never go outside. Many owners therefore assume that their indoor cats are safe from disease. Many feline diseases, such as diabetes, heart conditions and thyroid deficiencies, may develop regardless of where the cat lives.

Traveling to a veterinary office is an issue by itself, the study determined. 58% of owners reported that their cats hate going to the veterinary clinic. The study found that most cats fear being placed into a cat carrier and transported by car, so many owners rule out travel.

So, what's a responsible cat owner to do? After all, waiting until your cat is sick enough to resist less violently is not a reasonable option – even though a startlingly large percentage of cat owners resort to this very tactic.

In the interest of avoiding this worst case scenario, here are a number of tips and tricks to help make vet visits less stressful – for your cat and for you.

1. Keep the carrier out in a room your cat is comfortable in a day or two in advance of your cat's appointment. Place bedding inside – preferably something with your kitty's – or your – scent on it.
2. Encourage your cat to hang out in the carrier by placing treats, toys, or even catnip inside daily. Consider feeding kitty in it to help build a positive association
3. Use Feliway or a similar hormone spray or wipes on the inside of the carrier daily.
4. Give yourself extra time on the day of an appointment to get kitty into the carrier. Consider a towel (burrito) wrap, using one with a familiar smell before putting them in the carrier. There are lots of YouTube videos that can show you how to do this
5. Get the right size carrier. A large carrier is sometimes the only way to go because it can be impossible to squeeze a big cat through a narrow door. Consider a carrier with both a side and top door for loading and unloading.
6. Seat-belt the carrier into the car – preferably in the back seat – and consider covering the carrier with a towel or blanket since many stressed out cats seem to find a dark hiding place more comforting than a wide open space. Drive carefully and avoid loud music.
7. A nervous cat may soil the carrier, so bring extra bedding just in case.
8. Many vets have cat-only waiting areas. Make sure to ask, and if they don't, try to find a quiet spot away from dogs or other cats. Hold the carrier on your lap or place it on a chair securely rather than on the ground if there are other animals around.
9. You may be able to find a feline only hospital/clinic. If not, some hospitals have cat specialists, which can make the experience less stressful. Make sure to ask!
10. More vets are prescribing gabapentin as a great short term anxiety medication for cats. Other than drowsiness there is little risk of side effects. Many kitties will eat the contents sprinkled on food, making it easier to give it at home prior to a visit.

If you have a multi-cat household, the unfamiliar smells from the clinic may make the other cats anxious or even aggressive when you return home. Try leaving the returning kitty in the carrier, and if you sense tension, keep them in a separate room with food, water and a litter box for a minimum of 24 hours.

Using these tips and tricks can go a long way in creating calm, regular vet visits, which will improve your kitty's health and happiness now and well into the future. Happy vetting!

Sources:

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