

CHECKLIST FOR A STRESS-FREE VET VISIT

Many of our beloved pets don't go to the veterinarian for their recommended annual visit, forgoing the benefits of preventive medicine. The reason? Stress. Fortunately for our pet's physical and mental health - and ours -there is a shift toward low-stress veterinary care. Not only does stress negatively affect pets and create psychological trauma, it also can be so severe that test results are skewed, and their immune system is weakened. If your pet has experienced a lifetime of anxiety, reversing the chain of reactions during their trip to the vet can be challenging. Follow our steps to calm fears and turn your furry friend into a pet who loves the vet.

BEFORE THE VISIT

PRACTICE CARRIER TRAINING:

Most cats only see the carrier come out when it's time to visit the vet. This negative association ensures the carrier is seen as a harbinger of doom, leading to a major struggle to get your cat inside scratch-free. To avoid this association, leave the carrier out at all times, treating it as the deliverer of delicious snacks instead. Routinely throw a few high-value kitty treats into the carrier, leaving the door propped open. Your cat will sniff out the goodies and learn to associate good things with the box of doom. Line the carrier with a cozy blanket, spritzed with Feliway spray and add a soft toy or two to make your cat feel comfortable and secure while traveling. Feel free to read our cat carrier training document for some more information.

PRACTICE MUZZLE TRAINING:

Any dog, no matter how well-mannered, has the potential to bite, especially when feeling vulnerable, frightened or in pain. Used correctly, a properly designed muzzle is a useful safety tool during vet visits. Condition your dog to accept the muzzle prior to using it at the vet's office. Let him sniff it, then give him a treat. Repeat this numerous times to help him associate the muzzle with a reward, then progress to actually putting it on. The muzzle should be comfortable and properly fitted. It should not bind, rub, restrict breathing or obscure vision, and should only be used for a limited period.

PRACTICE HANDLING YOUR PET:

Two of the biggest challenges veterinary professionals face are a pet's feet and ears. Many pets do not approve of these body parts being manipulated, and often strongly object to being handled by a stranger. However, even a pet adopted later in life can be conditioned to accept handling, grooming, and restraint. Begin by pairing potentially unpleasant handling with delicious, high-value treats. Train your dog to give you his paw for nail trims or have your cat or dog focus on a whipped-cream cone while you clean his ears. Creating a positive association with the handling of these two tricky areas will vastly increase your pet's quality of life by reducing the struggle and fear commonly associated with nail trims and ear cleanings. Distraction with high value treats or toys, praise, and petting all work well at keeping your pets occupied during potentially unpleasant tasks, but conditioning them to realize good things come from handling goes a long way to reducing fear and anxiety.

DROP BY WITH YOUR PET FOR "HAPPY VISITS":

Does your pet only visit the vet for vaccinations or when he's sick? If so, it's no wonder he associates a trip to the clinic with being poked and prodded by strangers. Stop by for a few happy visits with no needles. Load up on your pet's favorite snacks and let our team offer them to your pet along with some massages and belly rubs.

ASK US FOR HELP:

Some pets become so fearful when visiting the veterinarian that they need anti-anxiety medication. Many pets benefit from a mild sedative, especially for nail trims and ear cleanings, but others may need additional medication, there is no shame in needing medication to calm your pet's nerves.

DURING THE VISIT

CALM YOUR FEAR FIRST, THEN YOUR PET'S:

Our pets are remarkably in-tune with our feelings and emotions. If you are nervous about a veterinary visit, your pet will pick up on that and become anxious. Project a calm demeanour, speak in a soft, soothing voice—no high-pitched, squeaky baby talk—and try to avoid excessive petting. Your pet will pick up on your calming cues and relax if you do.

COME AS A HUNGRY PET, LEAVE HAPPY:

Skip breakfast the morning of your appointment and bring treats you know your pet loves as a reward for good behaviour allowing us to provide your pet's favourite treat as a tasty distraction.

BRING COMFORT ITEMS:

Blankets and toys will make your pet feel a lot more at home during its time with us.

