



How to use a cat carrier

A trip to the veterinary surgery, moving house or travelling anywhere with your cat can be a stressful experience. A few simple measures can make the whole process more tolerable for cats and owners alike.

- Safety is extremely important when transporting your cat; the carrier or basket needs to be secure (to prevent escape) and it needs to be placed within the vehicle in a position that prevents too much movement should the car brake suddenly. **Never consider travelling with your cat loose in the car.**
- The ideal carrier is strong, relatively lightweight (some can become extremely heavy once your cat is inside), secure and easily cleanable. **Cardboard carriers are not suitable** as they can easily get damp and are no match for a determined escapee. There are numerous cat carriers on the market and it can be difficult to know which type is best.
- **Choose a basket or carrier that suits the size of your cat;** you want it to be large enough for your cat to sit or lie comfortably but not too large that it falls about in it. Any carrier with an opening at the top is preferable as this enables you to lower your cat in from above, always an easier manoeuvre if there is any degree of resistance.
 - If you already have a carrier that opens at the front you may find it easier to stand it on its end, enabling you to gently lower your cat in (bottom first) and shut the opening before slowly returning the carrier to an upright position.
 - Some robust, plastic carriers have top and front openings with a further option of removing the whole top section. This can make veterinary examination less stressful for your cat as it enables your veterinary surgeon to perform most basic procedures with your cat still nestling in the bottom part of its familiar basket.
- Many cats see the arrival of the cat carrier as a bad sign, so storing it in your attic or garage will only heighten your cat's perception of the basket as something negative, as it only appears just before a trip to the veterinary practice or the cattery. This can be easily avoided by **keeping the carrier out in the open** where your cat can use it as a bed and associate it with something familiar and reassuring. If this is not practical, taking it out at least several days prior to the trip and spraying it with Feliway® daily will help.

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When you do need to travel you may find the following tips helpful:

- Ensure that your **cat flap is shut**, if you have one, the night before and remains shut on the morning of your journey.
- If you are taking more than one cat on the journey **provide each cat with its own basket**, no matter how friendly they are with each other.
- Plan scheduled vet trips for vaccinations, dental treatments and preventative health care by making an appointment at a time when the journey will be **outside the rush hour**.
- Unless told otherwise by your vet, **withhold food for 4-5 hours before the journey** to keep the likelihood of vomiting, bowel and bladder activity to a minimum.
- **Spray the inside of the cat carrier with Feliway® spray** 15 minutes before introducing your cat (use sparingly with one spray in each corner and two on the floor and roof of the carrier). This is a synthetic analogue of naturally occurring cat pheromones secreted from glands in the cheeks and face that provide a message of security and familiarity.
- The lining of plastic sheeting, newspaper and then a towel or washable blanket will be sufficient to deal with any toilet mishaps en route, however it is probably wise to **take a spare set and a plastic bag for soiled bedding** just in case.
- In addition to the bedding inside the carrier, take a towel or blanket with you on the journey that **smells reassuringly of home**. This can be used to drape over the basket in the car. If your destination is the surgery, your vet may wish to use it to surround your cat with the security of home during the examination.
- If your cat panics at the sight of the carrier **try to get it in safely and gently at the first attempt**. Have the carrier close by but out of sight. Wrap your cat in a thick towel (preferably one that smells familiar) and place the cat and the towel into the carrier quickly.
- Once you are in the car and before you start the engine, secure **the carrier on the seat using the seatbelt**. Ensure that the basket is upright and not tilted to one side.
- Turn the car radio off or reduce the volume and **use a gentle, calm voice** to occasionally reassure your cat.
- Ensure that any heating or air-con blowers are **not directed at your cat**.
- **Drive as smoothly as possible** with minimal harsh braking or acceleration
- When you arrive, **transport the carrier in an upright position** and try not to swing it or bang it against doorways or your legs

