

AAFP Position Statement

Transport of cats

The primary welfare concerns with transportation of cats are safety, alleviation of fear and prevention of stress. The following principles are recommended to ensure the process of travel is a positive experience for cats and their owners.



From time to time the AAFP will respond to emerging new knowledge or issues that are of concern to veterinary professionals caring for cats. Our position statements, which represent the views of the association, are available at: www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/position/

Containment methods

Acceptable containment methods

- ✦ Sturdy, impact-resistant plastic or fiberglass commercial animal carriers are preferred. They offer the best impact protection, cannot collapse, generally have sides that offer a visual shield, can be positioned safely on a floorboard or level seat, where they can be secured with a seatbelt, and are easy to clean.
- ✦ Coated wire- or cage-type animal carriers are acceptable; they offer good impact protection, but generally do not provide the cat with visual privacy.
- ✦ Soft-sided, luggage/purse-type, basket-type or cardboard commercial animal carriers are acceptable as long as at least two sides have mesh or holes as ventilation. However, they offer minimal impact protection, may collapse or crush, and may be difficult to clean.
- ✦ Carriers that have both a top and a front opening for access are best. Top-loading carriers allow for minimal stress during the cat's placement in and removal from the carrier.¹ An opening in the front allows the cat to come and go as it pleases (especially important in crate-trained cats).
- ✦ Carriers that are constructed so that the top half may be removed permit the cat to remain protected in the bottom half of the carrier during veterinary exams. The cat may feel more secure and experience less anxiety.
- ✦ Carriers that offer visual security (at least two solid sides with minimal fenestrations) are ideal, as the cat may feel more secure and may be less likely to experience motion-induced anxiety or gastrointestinal distress.
- ✦ The carrier should have a leak-proof bottom, covered with plenty of absorbent material.²
- ✦ The carrier should be labeled with the owner's name and contact information as well as with the cat's name.
- ✦ Commercial, humane animal traps are acceptable for feral cats.

Unacceptable containment methods

- ✦ Pillowcases or other 'sack-like' enclosures may offer minimal ventilation, cannot be secured for stability and do not offer impact protection.
- ✦ Luggage or purses not manufactured for animal transport offer minimal ventilation, cannot be secured and offer little impact protection.
- ✦ Seatbelt harness restraint systems marketed for dogs are seldom effective. Due to the cat's flexible nature, these products cannot be relied upon to provide safe

restraint. In addition, this type of restraint may cause discomfort and anxiety in a cat unaccustomed to wearing a harness.

- ✦ Allowing the cat to roam free within the automobile is inappropriate.^{3,4} This creates an extremely dangerous scenario for both the cat and driver. The cat is unsecured and, therefore, is subject to severe injury in the event of an accident. The cat may interfere with the driver's hands, feet and vision, thus potentially compromising the ability of the driver to safely operate the vehicle.
- ✦ Cats must be confined to a carrier both during travel and when proceeding from the vehicle to the destination. This further ensures the safety of the cat by preventing injury or escape.

Adjusting the cat to the carrier

Get the cat used to the cat carrier well before travel⁴⁻⁶

- ✦ Leave the open carrier sitting out in the home so that the cat can explore it on his own.
- ✦ Place catnip or treats in the carrier.
- ✦ Place the carrier out permanently as a bed or hiding place for the cat.⁷
- ✦ Use a synthetic feline pheromone spray in the carrier routinely to minimize anxiety associated with the carrier.^{8,9}

Get the cat used to going for rides in the carrier^{4,5}

- ✦ Once the cat is comfortable in the carrier, take the cat (with a favorite treat, toy or other item from home) for brief test drives. Ensure that these drives are positive experiences. Initially, only drive a short distance (eg, one or two blocks). Gradually increase the distance as the cat's anxiety decreases. The goals are to allow the cat to become comfortable with car travel, and to minimize fear or anxiety by teaching the cat that a ride in the carrier does not always end at the veterinary hospital.
- ✦ Reward the cat verbally during travel.^{4,10}



Carriers that have both a top and a front opening for access are best. This cat was trained as a kitten to use the carrier as a safe haven. Courtesy of Dr Ilona Rodan

General welfare considerations for transport

Space, feeding and use of sedatives

- ✦ Use a carrier of appropriate size. The cat must be able to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably in a natural position within the carrier.²
- ✦ Whenever possible, and with the exception of a queen and her litter, avoid placing more than one cat in the carrier. Providing a carrier for each cat helps prevent redirected aggression that may occur if a cat becomes fearful.



Carriers that are constructed so that the top half may be removed permit the cat to remain protected in the bottom half of the carrier during veterinary exams. Courtesy of Dr Ilona Rodan

Transportation of feral, stray and shelter cats

- ❖ These types of cats should be transported in covered humane traps, in appropriate impact-resistant commercial carriers (as described under 'Acceptable containment methods'), or in feral cat dens.
- ❖ Animal control officers, whenever possible, should avoid transporting cats within sight, sound or scent of dogs.
- ❖ Carriers, traps and vehicle cargo compartments should be cleaned and disinfected with products effective against feline panleukopenia virus and calicivirus routinely after each use, and against dermatophytes when indicated.

- ❖ Avoid the use of sedatives or tranquilizers prior to travel. An animal's natural ability to balance and maintain equilibrium is altered under sedation, which can be dangerous when the carrier is moved. In addition, it is more difficult to visually monitor the cat for any adverse effects of the sedative when the pet is enclosed in the carrier.^{2,3} Finally, tranquilizers may reduce inhibitions, leading to a more aggressive cat.
- ❖ Avoid feeding prior to travel. It is generally recommended that the cat travels on an empty or near-empty stomach.³

Minimize fear, stress and anxiety^{1,10}

- ❖ Minimize noise (turn the car stereo volume down or off; avoid honking; avoid slamming doors).
- ❖ Close the car windows (to minimize noise and drafts).
- ❖ Avoid sudden starts and stops; avoid fast or sharp turns.
- ❖ Minimize motion sickness by keeping carrier on the floorboard, or cover one or two sides (always ensuring adequate ventilation) to block outside scenery.
- ❖ Speak to the cat in soft, reassuring tones. Reaching for or petting the cat while operating a vehicle is distracting and can be dangerous.
- ❖ Use a synthetic feline pheromone spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to travel.⁷⁻⁹
- ❖ Avoid 'dumping' a cat out of its carrier.⁴
- ❖ Bring favorite toys, treats or familiar bedding.^{1,4}
- ❖ Transport the queen and her kittens in the same carrier.

Minimize physical and thermal discomfort, pain and injury^{5,6,10,11}

- ❖ Once outside of the garage, bring the interior of the car to a comfortable air temperature (preferably one that is similar to that in the home) prior to placing the cat and carrier in the car. Maintain this temperature during the trip.
- ❖ Position the carrier away from direct flow from air vents.
- ❖ Never put a cat in a hot car.
- ❖ Never leave a cat in a parked car.
- ❖ Place absorbent pads or soft towels in the bottom of the carrier. Bring extra absorbent materials in the event the cat soils the carrier.

- ❖ Ensure that the carrier is clean before use.
- ❖ Avoid swinging the carrier when holding it.
- ❖ Ensure that there are no loose knobs, sharp surfaces, cracks or other objects in the carrier that could injure the cat. Ensure doors and removable tops are tight, functional and secure.
- ❖ Ensure that the carrier is sitting on a level surface at all times. Stabilize or secure the carrier in the car (latch with seatbelt, use weighted items to prevent sliding, etc.)
- ❖ Never place the cat on the bed of a pickup truck or similar exterior surface.

References

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- 11 American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Car travel tips. www.aspca.org/pet-care/pet-care-tips/car-travel-tips.html

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