

Feline Vet Visits

Did you know that according to a 2011 study of trends in veterinary medicine by Bayer Healthcare and Brakke Consulting that 60% of cat owners report that their cat hates going to the veterinarian? Furthermore 38% of clients say they get stressed just thinking about bringing their cat to the veterinarian. This is probably why out of the 86 million dogs and 78 million cats in this country twice as many cats as dogs never get a health check by a veterinarian. Of the cats that do visit the veterinarian they average 26% fewer visits than dogs.

Many people assume incorrectly that an indoor cat does not have exposure to parasites and illness so they skip the veterinary exam. Cats appear to be quite self sufficient and so their families assume that if they don't seem sick they don't need a physical exam. Unfortunately your cat may silently carry illness that can shorten its' lifespan a great deal and harbor disease that can spread to people.

Cats may pick up parasites by catching a mouse or playing in potting soil or being bitten by a mosquito. Some of these parasites such as roundworms and hookworms are transmissible to humans and can cause blindness and other symptoms as they migrate through us. There is no easy way to treat these parasites once they are in humans. Cats can even harbor the bacteria that cause Bubonic Plague.

All cats are susceptible to a range of metabolic diseases such as kidney disease, diabetes and pancreatitis. These diseases can decrease your cat's quality of life and drastically shorten its life if not detected in a timely manner. Cats have evolved to hide their illnesses so many times they will just sleep or hide a bit more when they have severe disease. Dental disease can be excruciatingly painful and is present in 90% of all cats. Veterinarians have been made aware of the dismal rate of cat visits to their offices and we are working to make our practices more cat-friendly. Lots of little touches can really help cats be more comfortable at the vet. A quiet area for cats away from dog patients prior to the exam, warm exam table surfaces, blankets to hide under during exams all help. Providing treats, patting, speaking quietly and calmly during exams and gentle handling will all help. The American Association of Feline Practitioners has a Cat Friendly Hospital Certification that hospitals can achieve through improvements in ten areas including waiting room, exam room, surgery, pain and anesthesia and hospital facilities to make the entire hospital a better experience for your cat.

So you are convinced your kitty needs health care. How do you get kitty in the cat carrier? The cat carrier must be a kitty Shangri-La. It must be spacious and clean. It must be out all the times with an open door, with treats and catnip, as well as warm blanket, such as a Kitty Kuddly (www.kittykuddly.com). You may give your cat praise with one word such as "good" as soon as she comes close to the carrier and again when she enters it. You might give a special treat only when your cat goes into the carrier. You might even use a special kitty pheromone called to attract your cat to the carrier. You actually plug it into an outlet near the carrier. Your cat is attracted toward the feline pheromones.

Do not be the owner who drags the dust laden moldy carrier up from the basement on the morning of the appointment, chases kitty around the house and attempts to stuff a flailing buzz saw of an angry kitty head first into a suddenly too small carrier. Frustrated and defeated clients in the process of canceling appointments have relayed sad tales of deep gouges, bloodshed, body and facial wounds inflicted by the unwilling patient to receptionists far too often. We humans rarely win a battle with a cat. It is always best to back down, take a deep breath and come up with another tactic-- maybe in a year or so -- maybe never? The statistics don't lie.

Following the behavior modification with the open door ever-present Shangi La pet carrier is the first step. After getting kitty in to the carrier have the car at a comfortable temperature and minimize loud noises during transport. Make sure the carrier is on a stable surface in the car so the carrier doesn't catapult (pun intended) around the car when you apply the brakes or turn a corner. Covering the carrier with a towel may make it seem more secure for your cat. Refrain from stuffing two cats into one carrier. Even cats that get along will become agitated and fight if crowded and stressed.

There are some wonderful house call veterinarians on the North Shore that are quite good at handling friendly house cats as well as cats that refuse to go into a carrier. A good number of cats that are tough to examine in a hospital setting are much better behaved at home. Even if you love your house call veterinarian, have a carrier out and train your cat to get in it, as you may need to evacuate your car in case of health emergency or weather emergency.

Do not despair. Patience, behavior modification, ingenuity and teaming up with your vet will all help you get your cautious kitty to the vet. After the veterinary visit you can both leave feeling that it was a comfortable and stress free visit for both of you.