



Getting the most out of trips to the vet

One feature of having a pet involves trips to the vet. Whether it be for preventative care, shots, and checkups or visits for injury and illness there are a variety of things that can be done to make the visit better for all involved. Over many years we have come to appreciate the benefits these efforts can have and want to share our experiences and insight with our pet caregivers.

Preparing your pet for the visit - There are many things that can be considered and done before the actual visit to the vet to help promote a positive experience. For cats and dogs that often includes efforts to "prepare" them for the visit. The "Fear Free" website - <https://www.fearfree.com/> - has a "Pet Parents" section with a variety of resources on this topic. Preparation for a visit can include:

- **"Training" your cat or dog for car rides to the vet:** If your pet is not used to leaving the home, just simply doing so can start to escalate their nerves. Keeping cats and dogs as calm and settled as possible will go a long way towards achieving a positive experience. For cats, practice getting them into a carrier under ideal circumstances - i.e. when you are not in a rush, when they are not already ill or injured, when getting into the carrier is not then followed by further stressors. Make it positive - use treats, feline pheromone sprays, and gentle approach so that they associate the carrier with good, positive experiences. For dogs the same concept (positive reinforcement) applies. Get dogs comfortable with car rides. Start with short trips - just drive a few minutes and then be done. Repeat this until your pet reliably associates car trips with things that benefit them - i.e. attention, praise, food/treats, etc..
- **Pre Visit Pharmaceuticals (PVPs):** A fancy name for medications that really do help lessen the fear, anxiety, and stress often seen in cats and dogs when they are out of their comfort zone. If we have recommended medications or supplements to use to help make your pet's visit better, please understand the intention - to make your experience, your pet's experience, and everyone's experience working with your pet better than it would be without these treatments. The intention and goal is not to make things perfect, but rather to make things "better". Preventing anxiety from getting worse in cats and dogs does help with future visits as well. PVP's work best when started before a visit - PRIOR to your pet experiencing fear, anxiety, or stress. PVP's will, by intention, change your pet's behaviors briefly while the medications are "in their system". Please understand that these changes are temporary, safe, and beneficial for your pet.



Preparing yourself for the visit -

- **Prepare questions, concerns and goals you want addressed at the visit.** It is not uncommon to go to the vet, your physician, your mechanic, etc. and forget many of the questions you had leading up to the appointment. Write your goals, questions, and concerns down or put them in your phone so that you can recall and ask all of them at the visit. This is especially beneficial if the primary caregiver of the pet will not be attending the visit.
- **Know the names of any medications your pet is receiving including heartworm and flea/tick prevention medications.** If your pet eats a special or therapeutic diet, know the specific name/type of diet. This is especially beneficial if the primary caregiver of the pet will not be attending the visit.





The visit itself -

Ideally, the person or people most familiar with the pet's history, medications, symptoms, etc. should be present at the visit. Consider whether it is better to bring one pet to a visit or if bringing several/all pets to a visit is a good idea. While it may be logistically easier to bring multiple pets to a visit, this oftentimes has negative consequences. This may include increased time in the clinic - keeping visits as efficient and brief as possible often works out better. This may also include increased stress on a pet - nervous pets can make those around them more nervous than they otherwise would be. Bringing multiple pets to a visit will likely increase that day's veterinary expenses. Intentionally spreading out preventative care services will spread out the expenses so that relatively large veterinary bills are avoided. We can readily work with you to help accomplish this.

Ask questions - Be involved - Trust us! Our goal is to make every experience for our patients and their people as positive as possible. Communicating with those that are providing veterinary services during your visit and trusting our recommendations and process helps towards that goal.



After the visit -

Think about whether all of your questions were answered - were all of your goals achieved: If not, let us know! We want your experiences and your pet's experiences to be positive. We are here to help and sometimes additional communication and feedback are needed to achieve positive outcomes. This can help both with your most recent visit and with future visits.

Think about your pet's experiences before, during, and after a visit: What can be done to help make future visits to the vet more positive? Should medications be used to alleviate anxiety associated with a visit? If medications have been used, does the timing of the doses or the amount given need to be adjusted to improve responses? Would a different type of cat carrier improve things? What could be done to make your pet feel more secure while riding in the car to the visit? Is the treatment plan going forward clear and understood or is clarification needed?

Other considerations -

Communicate! Communicate! Communicate! Letting us know your questions, concerns, goals, and experiences goes a long way towards creating a positive trip to the vet.

The veterinary team's perspective

All of these ideas and considerations really do help to make visits better for our patients, their people, and the providers of veterinary services.

For those cats and dogs that do not enjoy trips to the vet, please know we really do want to minimize the fear, anxiety, and stress they experience. Reducing these responses and behaviors help the pets, their people, and us too. What we do to help can take some try-and-see approach often, but trying usually works better than just accepting things as "normal".

There is no one-size-fits-all approach with veterinary care. Our patients rely on all of us to make their veterinary care experiences positive. Together we can work to help maximize the benefit from trips to the vet.



Questions? Concerns? Communicate with us!

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