

Nursing Care for Your Cat

Practical Tips for Pet Owners



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When in the unfamiliar and often scary place known as “the veterinary practice” your cat needs your confidence and reassurance, especially if it is sick. Your behavior greatly influences your cat’s sense of security and its behavior at the practice. Your nursing skills at home also play a major role in the success of the treatments that your veterinarian has prescribed to help your cat recover from illness or injury.

Your Role in Preparing for the Veterinary Visit

If your cat is stressed when going to the veterinary practice, ask your veterinarian for tips on how to acclimate your cat to the carrier or about anti-anxiety medication that you can administer before the visit. Withhold food from your cat for several hours before the appointment to avoid motion sickness. Take your cat’s favorite treats with you so that you or a veterinary team member can give them as a reward or distraction. Consider the use of synthetic feline facial pheromone spray (e.g., Feliway® or Comfort Zone®) in the carrier and car at least 30 minutes prior to help calm your cat. Place a favorite toy and familiar smelling clothing or bedding in the carrier as well.

The AAFP and ISFM have created a practical brochure called “Getting Your Cat to the Veterinarian” to provide tips to make the visit easier for you and your cat. This brochure can be found online at <http://catvets.com/GetCatToVet>.

Your Role at the Veterinary Practice

Cats can sense your stress, anxiety and apprehension, all of which can increase their own stress. Here are some tips to help create a more positive veterinary visit:

- If your cat is very anxious in the waiting area, or if dogs are present, ask the receptionist if you can go immediately to an exam room. Alternatively, cover your cat’s cage with a towel or your coat to block the view and muffle the sounds. Once you are in the exam room with your cat, talk to it soothingly in a low pitched voice.
- Avoid behaviors that while intended to comfort your cat, may actually increase anxiety. These can include clutching your cat, talking or staring in its face, and disturbing or invading its personal space. Human sounds intended to soothe or quiet (like ‘shhhh’) may mimic another cat hissing and should be avoided.



- Physical correction such as tapping your cat’s head and verbal reprimands should be avoided because they may startle your cat and provoke the fight-or-flight response. Remember, cats are not human and react differently to discipline.
- Do not handle or remove your cat from its carrier until requested by a member of the veterinary team.
- Reinforce your cat’s positive behavior with petting or treats and ignore negative behavior rather than trying to correct it.
- If your cat must stay in the hospital, bring along familiar toys and bedding from home. Provide the name of the cat litter and food that your cat is routinely given. Also mention anything that your cat enjoys (e.g., treats, brushing, or play-time activities). The veterinary staff can use this information to help make your cat’s stay more pleasant.

The Role of the Veterinary Practice

- To offer suggestions about treatment options that best match your cat’s personality and your ability to administer.
- To educate you on how to administer medications and demonstrate techniques if needed.
- To communicate with you about treatment, follow-up and behavior signs of wellbeing that signal recovery. Cats that feel good tend to sleep most often in a curled position. They groom themselves, follow a normal routine, interact with their owner, and eat and eliminate regularly.

Your Role in Nursing Care for Your Cat

The following nursing care tips will help you become an extension of the veterinary team after your cat returns home. Ask your veterinary practice to provide as much information as possible in writing, as well as references to online resources, such as videos. Do not be reluctant to approach the veterinary team if you have any questions during or after the visit.

Nursing care tips:

- Identify a quiet, familiar, and private space such as a small enclosure or alcove with good lighting where you can easily access your cat. A small space allows for close monitoring of your cat and provides it with a sense of security.
- Establish a routine for administering oral medication to your cat. A bathroom sink lined with a soft towel or fleece provides an enclosed, secure place for administering medication.



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- Give your cat positive reinforcement (e.g., treats, brushing, petting) for accepting medication.
- Unless your veterinarian says that medication must be administered with food, do not use food as an aid to giving medications, as it may cause aversion and reduce your cat's food intake.
- Flat food dishes, such as small paper plates, and shallow water bowls may improve intake by making food and water more accessible.
- Warm canned food to your cat's body temperature by gently heating in the microwave or adding warm water and stirring well. Additions of chicken broth or tuna juice may enhance taste.
- Food should always be fresh, provided in small portions, and replenished as needed.
- Forcing your cat to accept medication is stressful for both you and your cat. Do not forcibly remove your cat from a hiding place or interrupt eating, grooming or elimination for purposes of administering medication. Ask your veterinarian for a demonstration of how to administer the medication prescribed for your cat.
- Stay calm. Cats can sense our anxiety or frustrations, which may cause them to become fearful or anxious.
- Attend all follow up appointments with your veterinary practice. Alert the veterinary practice if you observe any signs of sickness or changes in your cat's behavior, as well as changes in food or fluid intake, or if you experience difficulty administering medications.



Providing nursing care at home for your cat may seem overwhelming at first, but be patient and remember that even small improvements will contribute to your cat's recovery. Remember that your veterinarian is there to help, so always ask any questions that may contribute to successful nursing care at home.

**You are an important member of your cat's healthcare team.
You can be instrumental in helping with the success
of treatments and improved healthcare.**