

## FACTSHEET

### Cat carrier training

A cat carrier or carry cage is often a trigger of stress and anxiety in many cats, but they don't need to be. It is very easy to carrier train your cat or kitten, all you need is patience and the right kind of cat carrier.

#### What is the best kind of carrier for your cat?

For vet visits or short car trips you want a cat carrier that doesn't give your cat too much room to move around. The bigger the carrier, the more chance your cat will move around a lot while the car is moving, and this can be very stressful for them. You want a carrier that is approximately the length of your cat's body (not including their tail) and the height of your cat when they are standing.

A top and front opening carrier is the best type as it provides the cat two entry or exit points, makes it easier for you to place your cat in the carrier and makes it easier for the vet to have a look at your cat without removing them from the carrier if they are stressed. Ideally a carrier with side clips that allows the top to easily be removed is a great idea as well.

Also consider the weight of your cat, soft mesh style carriers are great for kittens and small adult cats but a large 6kg cat can rip the mesh and escape. Similarly lighter weight plastic carriers are great for smaller size cats but not for larger adult cats, handles and clips can break due to the weight of the cat you are trying to carry. The carrier you got for your cat when they were a kitten is probably no longer suitable for them as an adult.

Also consider getting a fitted cover for your carrier or draping a blanket or towel over the top of the carrier. This will stop your cat being able to see through the door or sides of their carrier, which can cause stress. This will also prevent disease transmission when you go to the vet. Some diseases can be passed by particles in the air, so keeping your cat covered in the waiting room will help keep them healthy.

If you have limited storage space, there are carriers that can be flat packed very easily.

Airline approved carriers are available should you need to travel long distances.

#### How to train your cat for their carrier

Basically, you want to get your cat used to a carrier and avoid them feeling like the carrier is always associated with a bad or negative experience. It is best if you can keep the carrier out in the open as your cat will get used to seeing it. If you have limited space, try having it in a room at least once a week with the door open (or taken off) to let your cat get used to the carrier being around with no negative experience attached.

Place a blanket or bedding that already has your cats smell on it in the carrier and leave the door of the carrier open (or the top taken off if that's easier). Make sure to prop open the

door and place something in front of it so the door doesn't swing shut or close on its own and scare your cat. Spray the carrier with a some 'Feliway', if you have it. 'Feliway' is a product that imitates the pheromone cats give off when they rub their cheeks or flanks against things. This pheromone is a relaxing one that gives the cat a feeling of contentment and helps keep them calm. Let your cat brush up against the carrier and if you see them near it give them a treat or lots of pats. If your cat does not seem interested in going near the carrier, try spraying a little bit of catnip on the carrier or placing a couple of your cat's favourite treats in the back of the carrier to encourage them.

Once you notice your cat going in and out of the carrier on their own, place them in the carrier and close the door. Give them lots of treats through the front door and pick up the carrier and move it to another room. Then let your cat out and give them another treat. Repeat this step a number of times.

When your cat is in the carrier try to avoid swinging the carrier as this can cause more stress for your cat. If possible, hold the carrier close to your body to help your cat feel more safe and secure or even better, hold the carrier from underneath not by the handle as this will mean the carrier doesn't swing around when you are walking or moving.

The next step, once your cat is going room to room in the carrier without a fuss, is to get your cat in the carrier and place the carrier in the car. Spray some 'Feliway' in the car if you have it. Try and put the carrier in an area of the car where it won't move around too much. Behind the front seat on the floor or on the back seat with a seat belt around the carry cage is ideal. Start the car and leave it running for a few minutes or drive around the block then bring the carrier back inside. Once inside give your cat a few treats while they are still in the carrier and then let them out. Keep the carrier in an open spot so they can still go in and out if they wish. Do this several times so your cat gets used to being in the car without anything bad happening. Although a vet visit does not necessarily entail a bad experience, it can be stressful for your cat and that's what we want to avoid.

Some tips to remember

- Never let your cat roam free in the car. It is illegal to have a cat uncontained in a car as it is very dangerous
- Never place your cat in a laundry tub, cardboard box, or plastic tub instead of a carrier as these are not secure and your cat may get out or injure themselves
- Always place a blanket, towel or even a puppy pad in the bottom of the carrier to soak up any accidents
- Always check the door/s of the carrier close properly and cannot easily be pushed out. Large cats are very strong when stressed and can pop open the doors of cheaper pet carriers and escape
- Avoid placing more than one cat in a carrier. The stress of travelling in a carrier can make even the best of feline friends grumpy and being together in the carrier may cause fighting to occur
- Check your carrier for wear and tear. Screws can come lose over time and clips can wear down. Damaged parts may cause injury to your cat. The last thing you want to happen is for the carrier to break while you are getting your cat to the vet
- If your cat gets anxious with vet visits you may consider using a calming product for them the night before and morning of the vet visit, such as 'Feliway', calming treats and/or 'Zylkene'. You can also speak to your vet about prescription medication if your cat gets very stressed during vet visits

If you have more than one cat, you should always have one carrier per cat. Also keep in mind that after a vet visit your cat will smell differently so if you have another cat at home you may need to reintroduce your cats if one has been away for a day or two.

Try not to rush the process, it may take your cat months just to get to the point of sitting in or near the carrier. Just keep in mind you want to make it as stress-free as possible so never force them to get into the carrier unless it is an emergency.

As with all training, don't expect immediate results. It takes time and lots of patience to train a cat, but it can be done! Please feel free to call Cat Protection on 9519 7201 if you have any questions about training your cat for their carrier.

*While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.*