

STRESS

(in cats)

Reducing the stress of our feline friends is important so that we can provide better care to our patients and enrich our bond with them and their owners. Effective stress reduction is a multi-faceted and nuanced goal that begins with the owner's behavior in the home, and continues throughout the process of loading your cat into the carrier, transporting her in the car, and managing the experience here at the hospital. In order to best achieve these ends, it is important to understand that, though domesticated, cats retain many of the behaviors and instincts of their wild ancestors:

- 🐾 Cats like to have a sense of control over their surroundings; like us, this control makes them feel more comfortable and lessens anxiety;
- 🐾 Cats prefer predictable surroundings and routines;
- 🐾 Cats establish familiar territories and reinforce that area with pheromone scents and visual cues;
- 🐾 Cats have exaggerated fear responses (a protective mechanism). Nevertheless, in stressful situations most cats would prefer to avoid confrontation or to hide, using fighting or aggression only as a last resort;








But, what happens during a trip to the veterinarian?

- 🐾 We eliminate virtually all control from our companion;
- 🐾 We remove them from their daily established routines and comforting environments.
- 🐾 We replace routine with a stressful car ride and an environment filled with unfamiliar smells and sights.
- 🐾 We place them in a situation from which they are unable to retreat or avoid and in which they may perceive they have no other choice but to respond with aggression. This can be exaggerated by inappropriate handling or over-restraint.

Is it any wonder that our friends are anxious and unsettled on their arrival here at Civic Feline Clinic?

So what do we do about it?

Remember that the most effective stress reduction starts early, begins in the home and is an ongoing process. Cats are highly perceptive and may notice very subtle cues. If you are stressed about an upcoming visit to our hospital, it is entirely likely you are unintentionally communicating that stress to your companion. Being intentional about minimizing the predictable, inevitable stresses that accompany a trip to the veterinarian's is critical in effectively reducing anxiety for both you and your friend.

-  Train your cat to consider the carrier a safe haven.
-  Familiarize your cat with the car.
-  Be generous with pheromone sprays such as Feliway.
-  Consider and discuss the use of pre-visit medications, such as gabapentin, with your veterinarian.
-  Understand and be an active part of the feline-friendly practices we use here at the hospital including but not limited to:
 - Providing “safe places” throughout the facility;
 - Limiting areas where your friend can see other, unfamiliar cats;
 - Minimizing transitions in which your companion is moved from one area to another;
 - Providing consistent and predictable interactions with your friend by the same people whenever possible;
 - Respecting the importance of your cat’s superior sense of smell by retaining your cat’s smell when possible, and by providing synthetic facial hormones throughout the hospital;
 - Supporting your cat’s sense of control by allowing him to initiate interaction with staff and allowing him, as much as possible, to be where he wants to be, including during the exam.
 - Allowing your friend to feel hidden, if she prefers.
 - Using respectful handling techniques.
 - Intervening with tranquilizers or sedatives if cat-friendly handling proves ineffective in handling your friend in a dignified and safe manner.

Please ask any staff member for more information and read more detailed information about these individual items in our additional handouts. We thank you for understanding these concepts and for being an active partner in our fear-free, cat-friendly practice.

The doctors and staff of Civic Feline Clinic