



Cat Behaviour Guide

Traveling in a Car with Your Cat



Does your cat struggle with car rides or show signs of stress after returning from a trip, like a visit to the vet? This guide will help you prepare your cat for smoother car rides and a more comfortable return home.

The first step to stress-free travel is training your cat to enjoy their carrier. We recommend starting with our guides on [Choosing a Cat Carrier](#) and [Cat Carrier Training](#).

Where Should Cats Be in Vehicles?

- **Carriers are Essential:** The safest place for your cat in a vehicle is inside their carrier. If you have more than one cat, each should have their own carrier. A hard-sided, secured and covered carrier prevents distractions and reduces the risk of your cat hiding under pedals, suffering from motion sickness or being unprotected in case of an accident. It also helps your cat feel more secure.
- **Placement:** The best location for a carrier is on the floor behind the front passenger or driver's seat. Ensure the carrier is designed to withstand the pressure of a seat belt if you decide to secure the carrier with a seat belt.
- **Stability:** Use rolled-up blankets or towels around the carrier to keep it upright and stable, reducing wobbling and the bumpiness of the ride.

Teaching Your Cat to Enjoy Car Rides

1. **Comfortable Environment:** Ensure the car's temperature is comfortable (not too hot or cold) before placing your cat inside.
2. **Acclimation:** Cats are sensitive to vibrations and loud noises. Start by turning the motor on and off to help your cat get used to the sound and feel of a running vehicle. Gradually increase the duration as your cat becomes more relaxed.
 - Play cat-specific calming music at a normal volume to help mask engine noise.
3. **Short Practice Drives:** Once your cat is comfortable with the motor running, take a short drive around the block. Have a second person join to monitor your cat and offer treats throughout the drive to help make the experience positive and safe.
4. **Avoid Negative Associations:** Don't make every car ride a trip to the vet. Instead, take your cat on short trips to enjoyable locations like a local park.
 - Ask your vet about "happy visits," where staff provide treats and attention to help your cat associate vet visits with positive experiences.

Tip: If your cat gets carsick, avoid feeding them for a few hours before the ride. Signs of nausea include refusing treats, drooling, licking lips, increased swallowing or gulping, and vomiting. Consult your vet about nausea medication, and consider using non-food rewards like toys, petting or catnip if your cat is prone to carsickness.



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After Returning Home from a Trip

Have you ever noticed your cats fighting after one returns from a trip, even though they usually get along? This is due to non-recognition aggression, where a cat may mistake their housemate for a stranger because of unfamiliar scents picked up outside the home. The longer the separation, the more likely this is to happen.

- **Prevent Fights:** Never let cats “sort it out” themselves after one comes home. A single bad fight can damage their relationship permanently.
- **Decompression Time:** After a trip, place their carrier in a quiet room with all essential resources (food, water, litter, scratching post, bed, hiding spots), and allow your cat to exit the carrier on their own to decompress. This safe space helps your cat shed unfamiliar smells and recover from the stress of travel.
- **Scent Swapping:** While your cat is decompressing, swap bedding or blankets between your cats to help them reacquaint with each other’s scent.
- **Reintroductions:** Every time a cat leaves the house, reintroduce them to their housemates slowly, just like bringing a new cat home, to prevent non-recognition aggression.
- **Vet Visits:** If possible, take both cats to the vet together, even if only one has an appointment. This way, both cats return with similar new smells, reducing the chance of conflict.
- **Carrier Care:** Wash the carrier with unscented soap and replace the bedding with something familiar, like a bed or blanket your cat has used before. Place the carrier in a familiar spot at home to encourage your cat to continue using it as a comfy resting place.

Additional Resources:

For more information on preventing post-trip conflicts, check out the [Fear Free - Cat Fight! Why Cat Friends Fuss After Vet Visits](#). For more free resources and information on companion animals, visit our website at: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behavioural questions by emailing: askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

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