



Teaching your cat to happily enter a carrier is a valuable skill for vet visits, moving and travel. Carrier training not only makes transport easier for you but also reduces stress for your cat.

General Tips

- **Choose the Right Carrier:** Refer to our guide on Choosing a Cat Carrier for tips on selecting the best carrier for your cat.
- **Pace Matters:** Depending on your cat's previous experiences, some steps may take longer than others. Be patient and move at your cat's pace.
- **Short Sessions:** Keep training sessions brief (up to five minutes each) and practice regularly.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Use high value treats and meals to create positive associations with the carrier. If your cat is particularly wary, try extra special treats like crunchy snacks, tuna, lickable treats or cream cheese.
- **Keep It Fun:** Always prioritize your cat's comfort and enjoyment during training.

Tip: If your cat is extremely nervous about the carrier or gets sick during travel, consult your veterinarian for advice on easing their anxiety or nausea.

Let Your Cat Get Used to the Carrier

Cats can be wary of new items, especially those that don't smell familiar. To help your cat feel more comfortable, integrate the carrier into their daily environment.

- **Keep It Accessible:** Place the carrier in a location where your cat frequently rests, with the door open or removed. Keeping the carrier out at all times helps it pick up the scent of your home, and reduces the association with scary events like vet visits.
- **Create Comfort:** Add your cat's favorite bed or blanket inside to make the carrier more inviting.
- **Create a Safe Space:** Cover the carrier with a blanket or towel to create a cozy, den-like environment.
- **Elevate the Carrier:** Place the carrier on a stable surface like a table or shelf to make it more appealing. Make sure it won't fall and that the surface is large enough for the cat to get into the carrier.
- **Encourage Exploration:** Place treats, catnip or favorite toys inside and around the carrier to entice your cat to explore.
- **Use Pheromones:** Spray a synthetic pheromone like Feliway inside the carrier and wait 10-15 minutes before allowing your cat to explore.

Tip: Even if your cat is harness-trained, bringing a carrier on walks and vet visits is still wise. It can serve as a portable sanctuary if something frightening, like a dog or loud truck, passes by.



Training Your Cat to Enter the Carrier

Step 1: Feed Near the Carrier

Start by feeding your cat treats or meals near the carrier with the top off. If your cat is hesitant, move the food further away. At each meal, gradually move the food closer as your cat becomes more comfortable.

Step 2: Feed Inside the Carrier

Once your cat is relaxed near the carrier, place the food just inside the door. Gradually move it further inside at each meal as your cat gains confidence. If your cat hesitates or drags the food out, move the bowl to a more comfortable location and allow time for your cat to adjust.

Continue feeding treats inside and outside the carrier between meals.

Step 3: Introduce a Cue

When your cat comfortably enters the carrier, you can begin to teach them the cue to go inside, like "carrier" or "go inside". To teach them the cue, say the word as they enter and then reward them once they are inside the carrier.

Repeat this cue → enter → reward pattern to help them learn the cue. After repeating this they should learn the cue and reliably enter the carrier when you ask.

Step 4: Attach the Top

Once your cat is comfortable eating in the carrier with the top off, reattach the top and repeat the earlier steps with the door open. Continue using the cue you've chosen.

Step 5: Close the Door

Gradually introduce the movement of the door. Ask your cat to enter the carrier, then move the door a few inches and immediately open it and reward your cat. Slowly work up to closing the door fully, but not yet latching it as the noise and movement may startle them.

Use a consistent word like "door" when moving the door to reduce surprises for your cat.

While you're working on closing the door, get your cat used to the noise the latch makes. Practice closing and latching the door and rewarding your cat while your cat is not in the carrier, allowing them to get used to the sound.

Tip: Do not force your cat to stay inside with a closed door, as this will make them feel trapped and likely make them afraid of the carrier.



Step 6: Increase Time Inside

As your cat becomes more comfortable, close the door, latch the door, give a treat and then open the door. Gradually increase the time the door stays closed, rewarding your cat throughout.

Step 7: Introduce Lifts

Once your cat is comfortable in a stationary carrier, start introducing movement. Start by only picking up the carrier before you introduce any other travel.

Begin with slow lifts. Raise the carrier slightly off the ground, give a treat and set it back down. Repeat picking the carrier up and gradually lift it higher each session.

Step 8: Expand Movement

When your cat is relaxed during lifts, you can begin to move while holding the carrier. Pick the carrier up, take a step and give your cat a treat. Continue repeating this and slowly expand your range of movement as long as your cat is happily taking treats after each step.

Tip: *Covering the carrier with a blanket can help your cat feel secure by blocking out scary sights and smells.*

With patience and consistent practice, your cat will not only tolerate the carrier but may even come to enjoy it! Once your cat is comfortable, check out our guide on [Traveling in a Car with Your Cat](#) for more tips on stress-free road trips.

What Not to Do:

- ✗ Don't store the carrier away and only bring it out for vet visits.
- ✗ Don't swing the carrier around or let it bump it against your legs, walls or doors.
- ✗ Don't forcefully dump or pull your cat out of the carrier.
- ✗ Don't push or force your cat into the carrier, as this can cause long-term fear and anxiety.

Additional Resources

For more information, check out the [Cat Friendly Clinic - Carrier Training Videos](#) for visual guidance on carrier training. For more free resources and information on companion animals, visit our website at: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/>

Did You Know?

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