

Traveling and moving with your cat

One of my first purchases as a cat owner was a sturdy, plastic cat carrier for trips to and from the cattery or the vet. Long distance trips, like over two hours, should wish to go on a holiday with your kitties will also require a good quality, plastic, hard-sided carrier lined with newspaper and or covered with a blanket. It must be large enough to allow your cat/kitten to turnaround, sit up and stand up.

Getting your cat or kitten used to the carrier long before your trips is absolutely essential and you should encourage him/her to go in by placing toys and treats inside. Make the carrier accessible at all times in a safe, out of the way area in your home. Once he/she is used to it and voluntarily enters it, take him/her on short trips. Start with carrying the kitty in the carrier from one room to the next and progress according to the comfort levels of your companion.

Water

If possible, provide a small amount of water in a higher-sided bowl that won't spill. If you can't find a bowl that won't spill, stop and offer water to your pet every hour. Some pet stores and veterinary clinics sell collapsible, plastic water bowls that can be very handy for travelling with your pets. Consider taking water from your former home, if you are moving home, that your pet is used to drinking and it might minimise the stress of having to adapt to so many new things in your cat's life. In some instances, different water could upset your cat's stomach.

Feeding

Most cats tend to eat a little at a time throughout the day, so most cats don't need to have food in their carrier for trips shorter than two hours in duration. For longer trips, it is recommended that you place food in your cat's carrier. Alternatively manually offer food every two to three hours. Don't be surprised or too concerned if your cat is too stressed to eat.

Please note that the above recommendations apply to adult cats only. Kittens are generally not able to go without food and water as long as adult cats and it would be preferable to provide food and water in their carrier all the time, or stop more often than 2-3 hours to ensure they eat and drink.

Harnesses and leashes

Most people only think of harnesses and leashes when they think of owning dogs. Contrary to popular belief, cats can accept and enjoy a harness or leash just as much and could come in very handy long before your trip. Start by letting the harness rest on your cat's body for short periods of time. Once accepted, allow your cat to wear the harness around the house for short periods of time.

Once your beloved cat has gotten used to the idea of wearing a harness, make sure that your pet has his/her harness on the entire time he/she is out of the carrier, especially if you decide to walk your cat at a rest stop.

The right temperature

Under most circumstances, if you're comfortable then your cat will be comfortable. Avoid extreme temperatures/temperature changes. Please make sure that you never leave your cat unattended. If you must leave your car for whatever reason, make sure someone remains with your cat to monitor the temperature.

Identifying your cat

All pets that you intend to travel with, either short or long distances with, should be microchipped, as well as have a collar with a phone number on it. A good idea would be to always have a picture of your pet in case he/she escapes and you need to employ the assistance of other people to help you find him/her.

Check up before travel

Have your pet examined and vaccinated (according to local regulations) before a long trip and store your pet's vaccine record in a safe location. If your move involves crossing provincial borders, your pet must have a health certificate issued by your veterinarian well in advance and prior to the commencement of your travelling. Authorities could ask to see the certificate if you are stopped. Airlines usually require a health certificate as well as a current vaccination certificate. Other restrictions may apply and it would be best to consult your veterinarian and local authorities when planning your trip.

Sedating cats

The only time cats should be sedated during travel is if they become so upset that they are in danger of hurting themselves. Sedation causes pets to lose their sense of balance,

leading to injury and even death from falls, which makes it even more important that a suitable cat carrier be used. They can also have trouble breathing. Only use a sedative prescribed by your veterinarian based on the pre-trip physical examination and any pre-existing conditions that may be pertinent. Make sure you can observe your cat at all times during the trip. To make sure it's safe, test the sedative on your cat long before travel. If at all possible, try to avoid sedating kittens.

If you are moving multiple pets, always place them in separate carriers to avoid stress.

If your pet gets sick during travel

Before you begin your trip, your veterinarian will advise you as to whether your cat is healthy enough to travel and what appropriate precautions may or may not be required. Ideally, you should always identify animal hospitals on your route in case of an emergency, or in the case of public transportation, ensure that they are equipped to handle any potential complications that may arise with pets under their care. Airlines are generally well equipped for this, but travelling by other modes of transportation may not be.

Settling into your new home

Once you have reached your new home, if you have a pet who adapts well, you can let him/her roam around the house. Show your cat where the litter box and food are. If your cat doesn't adapt well to new situations, confine him/her to one room initially with his/her litter box and food. Allow your pet to explore the house after he/she seems comfortable under your guidance and support. If your cat didn't eat a lot during the trip, offer him/her small amounts of food every couple hours, so he/she doesn't overeat and become sick.