

CRITTER CHATTER-CAT FRIENDLY VISITS??

Cats are one of nature's most unique creatures. What other creature has a welcoming purr, such swift and elegant reflexes, and the independent yet appealing personality than that of the feline?

It is yet again time for your cat Whisker's annual veterinary visit. You recall this dreadful event last year...the squirming and thrashing involved in getting Whiskers into the carrier, his continuous yowling during the car ride, and how your sweet little Whiskers suddenly evolved into a ferocious Bengal tiger while the veterinarian examined him. The thought invades your mind that it would be so much easier to just skip this year's visit, and after all Whiskers has been fine at home.

Imagine that you are Whiskers. You are sleeping soundly on your favorite corner of the couch, enjoying the relaxing ray of sunshine coming through the window. You are abruptly uprooted from your location and then shoved into a plastic box. The door is shut and you cannot get out. This is definitely not good and you are in trouble, although you have no idea what is happening. In response to this absurdity, you start to claw at the door to try to get out and begin to voice your opinion that you are in trouble. You are then taken to a vehicle, that has very stinky odors and deafening noises coming out of it. All you want is to be back on the couch in your little ray of sunlight. Hello...does anyone know what is going on here, and that this is extremely stressful? You know that you are about to die, but your body doesn't feel that old or decrepit. Finally, the vehicle stops, and your box is lifted out of the vehicle. Thank goodness, you are going back to your couch. But no...you are taken into some building with strange noises, smells of scared animals, and all these unfamiliar people. You know your life is about to end, so you decide to fight with everything you have in you.

If you consider the trip to the vet from the cat's perspective, it is very easy to see how such a trip can be upsetting and super stressful to your feline friend. Cat's are connoisseurs at pretending all is going well, when in fact, they may not feel their best. Many owners can easily miss the minute changes in behavior, appetite, water intake, or bathroom habits that can indicate that something is awry with their pets bodies. Consider that their visit to the vet is like humans going for their annual physical, just to make sure everything is still working like it should, and if it isn't to hopefully get things back on track. So before you decide to forego this year's visit to the vet, remember that you are potentially preventing your friend's doctor from helping your loving feline live life to the fullest. Here a few helpful tidbits that may make things a bit easier before the next vet visit:

1. Keep the cat carrier out all the time. The carrier can be attractively hidden under a chair or end table with an overthrow. Allowing the cage door to be open, will allow the cat to investigate this "new box." In addition, cat toys, catnip, and treats can be offered in the carrier to make things more enticing for the cat. Tuna, soy milk, or cat food can also be fed in the carrier, making the carrier a positive place and less likely to conjure up negative feelings associated with vet visits, travel, and leaving home.
2. Try using Feliway. Feliway is a pheromone, which is a chemical produced by an animal that helps to change the behavior of other members of its species. This product comes in diffusers that plug into an electric outlet, wipes, and sprays. The carrier can be spritzed with Feliway prior to getting the cat into the carrier, or a cloth can be spritzed with the product and left in the carrier with the cat.
3. Bring a fresh fecal sample to the vet's office. This prevents unwanted probing and prodding to procure a fecal sample at the office, and allows nature to provide a representative sample of your feline's normal bathroom habits.
4. Ask the vet for gabapentin. This is a prescription medication, that comes in a capsule and the contents mixed with canned food, soy milk, tuna, etc. When given to a cat about an hour prior to the appointment, it helps to reduce anxiety and calm the cat for exams, routine handling, and travel. The effects of gabapentin are often not sufficient for blood draws or other procedures.
5. Allow the cat to investigate its surroundings. Once at the vet's office and in the exam room, the door of the carrier should be left open to allow the cat to inspect the room, sniff the corners and check out the new surroundings. Toys, hiding spots, cat towers, treats, and play areas can be offered to help reduce stress. Soft, relaxing music and keeping away from barking dogs or loud noises can also help to minimize stress on the cat. Because moving locations is very upsetting, cats should be kept in one location and not taken to a different room if at all possible.
6. Appropriate handling. Except in the most extreme situations, scruffing a cat is not acceptable as a means of routine handling. By using thick towels to cover fractious cats, and by performing the exam in a box or carrier, many cats feel more secure and hidden. Treats, baby food, canned food, or toys can also be offered to the cat during the exam to help distract them from handling, vaccinations, or examination.

By taking your cat to the veterinarian for regular checkups, you are helping your feline friend to get the most out of their nine lives.