



Frequently Asked Questions About Low Stress/Fear Free Visits

Why doesn't my pet like veterinary visits or car rides? Is the vet or their staff mean to my pet?

Just like we humans often get nervous to go see the doctor or dentist, many pets have nervousness or fear surrounding their vet visit. This can be shown as different behaviors in the car, at the veterinarian's office, or even changes in behavior when they return home. Veterinarians and their teams love pets, so why do our pets sometimes get so scared? This anxiety is most often related to change in routine, the car-ride, and our pet's ability to remember uncomfortable experiences and read our emotions.

- **CHANGE:** Cats in particular hate change at all and dogs read subtle changes such as when you leave for work and how you dress when you leave. When our pets notice things like the cat carrier coming out of the closet or you getting the harness and leash but not driving towards the dog park, they feel uncomfortable because it is out of their normal routine.
- **THE CAR RIDE:** Many pets seem to be "worked up" in the car, pant excessively, or even have accidents on the ride - interestingly, even though they often don't vomit, we know that this is related to changes in the vestibular system related to car sickness. Our pets often tell us that they are motion sick by exhibiting signs of anxiety!
- **REMEMBERED EXPERIENCES:** As veterinarians, we are the ones who care for your pets when they are feeling their worst. Animals have a center in their brain that creates a connection when they experience a painful event and teaches them to avoid or fear it in the future. Sometimes, when pets have painful conditions like ear infections or worse, that pain is briefly sharper during exam or treatment. This causes their brain to create a connection that associates the veterinary clinic environment and that pain. They can't override that instinctual connection, so often they need medication to help block that memory and repeated visits to desensitize them to that fear.
- **PET OWNER EMOTIONS:** If your pet has experienced anxiety at the vet's before or even if they haven't but they are ill, odds are that you are at least a bit worried or concerned about their visit. Your pet knows you like no one else and they can tell you have something on your mind. When your pet knows that, they go on guard because they love you so much. You love them right back, and that's why you know it's so important for them to have regular veterinary care and you want to find a way to make it more enjoyable for them.
- **GOOD NEWS:** You and your veterinarian can work together to make vet visits more enjoyable for both you and your pet! There is a lot you can do at home and with the vet team to provide your pet with a different kind of veterinary visit, one that is mindful of your pet's emotional needs as well as their physical wellbeing.

What can I do at home to help my pet be less anxious at the veterinary visit?

- Keep cat carriers out with a comfortable blanket so your cat views it as part of their normal safe place. Consider using a carrier with a pet bed (such as a SleepyPod carrier) so that your pet feels comfy riding to the vet. If you can not keep the carrier out at all times, please keep it out and feed your cat in it (with the door open) for at least 1 week prior to visit.
- Make as few changes to your normal routine as possible - if your appointment is early in the morning, get up a bit earlier so your dog still gets their full walk
- Don't give your pet their morning meal the day of their visit. This helps avoid stomach upset and also makes them hungrier for the yummy treats at the vet office.
- Bring your pet's favorite treats along with you to the vet office for the vet team to give to encourage bonding.
- Don't make a big deal out of going to the vet, just treat this like a normal trip. Keep your voice and home preparations to leave calm just like any other time you might ride together.
- If your veterinary team has prescribed pre-visit anxiety reducing medications please be sure to follow instructions carefully when administering them and to call your vet care team if you have any questions about your pet's response to those medications before you change the dose.
- Please consult your veterinarian before using any over the counter relaxing supplements such as CBD and essential oils as these products could interact with medications or treatments your pet needs during their visit. The veterinarian will guide you as to what is the best supplement or pheromone for your pet's needs - see below for more info.



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How can I make the car ride easier for my pet?

- Spray your car and any travel equipment (ie. carriers, harnesses, etc) with species specific pheromones 30 minutes before leaving. Feliway, Adaptil, and Thunderworks are the most effective brands.
- Be sure to carry your cat carrier both to and from the car by holding the bottom. Do not drag the carrier on the ground or carrier it by the top center handle. A swinging carrier is very frightening!
- For dogs, the safest place in the car is in a dog crate that is the same style as they use at home. For dogs who are not crate trained, please be sure to use a proper safety restraint.
- Cat carriers should have a top that can be easily removed by veterinary teams (buckle latches are much better than screw bolts).
- Drape a light weight blanket or towel over the cat carrier so that your kitty feels safe and not overstimulated by traffic going by
- Stay calm and use a quiet, soothing voice if you talk to your pet. Talk to them as if you are telling them about your day when you soothe them. Our pets easily feed off of our anxiety and high pitched tones or “baby talk” can make them worry about you.
- Play classical music or a calming voice podcast - pets prefer classical and audio readings.

What does the Healing Paws Veterinary Care team do at the visit to make my pet less anxious?

- At each visit, we perform emotional evaluations, completing forms that we review each time in order to get to know our pet's preferences and what causes them stress.
- With your pet's dietary requirements in mind, we consider the vet clinic “grandma's house”. Your pet is allowed to have extra special snacks with us and we make sure that they get those snacks just for being special. We love to see them do tricks but we give out treats for free!
- If your pet is a hugger you'd better believe we give out hugs, but (just like some people) not all pets love hugs, so for those that don't, sometimes we sing to them while we work, avoid eye contact if they want that, or just simply work quietly, calmly, without excitement - whatever it takes to keep them from feeling pushed too far.
- Our team is Fear Free Certified and trained in Low Stress handling techniques - this means that we will read your pet's body language and preferences and hold them accordingly. For some dogs this means allowing them to stand between us and a wall, for others it means sitting in our arms like a baby and for others it means a snug tight hug hold so they feel secure. For cats, it means the doctor examining them where they are happiest - the bird garden window, in the sink, on the floor, the kitty chooses! Many cats prefer being wrapped in a fleece blanket, some want to hide their faces, and others want to be examined in their carrier with the top off.
- To take blood samples and give vaccines, every injection or venipuncture requires a small gauge sterile hypodermic needle - this makes the procedure much less painful and, because they are often quick and your pet is eating or getting an ear rub, many pets don't even notice the sting!
- Calm staff, calm environment, calm music, LED lighting, calm paint colors, cat-only exam and treatment areas, and appointments scheduled long enough to avoid rush all keep your pet (and you) feeling calmer!
- Waiting rooms and lobbies are filled with smells and sounds that can worsen your pet's anxiety. At Healing Paws, your pet will go right from your car to their examination team to avoid having to meet other new pets and people.
- Cat specific exam areas have cat calming pheromones, window seats, climbing shelves, cat nip, laser toys, fuzzy blankets, canned food, dry snacks, tuna, cheese, Churu squeeze up snacks, shrimp and more!
- Dog specific exam areas have dog calming pheromones, tennis balls, squeaker toys, cheese, sunflower butter, soft snacks, hypoallergenic treats, fuzzy blankets and clickers!



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- Did you know that muzzles are about more than keeping an animal from biting? They actually provide benefits to your pets. At Healing Paws Veterinary Care, we only use basket muzzles for dogs and Jorvet premium muzzles for cats. These two types of muzzles most importantly let your pet breathe easily without having their mouth be held shut. The cat muzzles are fantastic in that they also cover your kitties eyes which calms them so much because cats are often overstimulated by seeing new things, new people and new places. The dog's basket muzzles are literal treat baskets! We always place cheese, sunflower butter, or soft treats in our basket muzzles before applying them to your dog so that they can eat while they are receiving treatment. In pets that are painful or scared, there is a chance they may bite to tell us to please be careful or leave them alone - if they are wearing a muzzle, this protects the team. When the team is protected they don't have to hold your pet so tightly to prevent a bite and then your pet can be held less tightly while the team stays safe.
- If your pet is showing a high FAS (fear, anxiety, stress) score, not only will the above procedures be followed, but your veterinarian will also develop a personalized anxiety relieving supplement and medication plan for your pet. Just like people, some pets have anxieties that are due to chemical imbalances (even if it is situational anxiety) in their brain and they just need a little medical help to balance. Many pets have significantly better veterinary experience if given anxiety medications at home the night before and day of their visit. These protocols are not about knocking out your pet - they are about helping them feel more relaxed and balanced so that they don't have to experience fear and so that they can start to retrain their brain that vet visits are okay. Your pet may really enjoy the visit much better with pre-visit protocols and you will breathe a sigh of relief to see how much better things go!

Why does the doctor want my pet to take medications at home for their next visit?

- Motion sickness in pets often is shown as signs of anxiety. Safe motion sickness medication before your pet's visit is often the first step of creating a less stressful experience.
- Medications start calming your pet before they arrive so that they have a chance to overcome situational anxiety or phobias (fear of needles, cars, white coats, etc).
- Anxiety builds on itself and if your pet starts with anxiety based on small changes at home before leaving, this will build in the car and build even more once at the veterinary clinic. Reducing the anxious chemicals in the brain at home first makes a huge difference before the adrenaline of the car ride and the vet visit has a chance to get involved.
- Giving a small dose of medication the night before will get your pet into a calm state before the day when changes occur and will reduce the normal anxiety chemicals in the brain to a slightly below normal point so that, with an additional dose before the visit, your pet's anxiety chemicals will be at a low normal place. This means that even with a car ride and vet visit those anxiety brain chemicals won't have a chance to go as high as they had in the past and your pet will stay more relaxed!

Will my pet be a zombie or addicted to their medication? I want them to be themselves.

- Your pet may be sleepy for the day following their medications and appointment but will still recognize you and interact like the friend that they are.
- There is no risk of pet addiction to these medications. Please be sure the veterinarian knows any and all over the counter products you use in order to avoid drug interactions.
- Most pets taking pre-visit anxiety medication protocols show nothing other than positive behavior changes. However, just like a glass of wine can affect some people more than others, some pets do get quite drowsy or "tipsy" with their very first dose of medication. If your pet seems tired or tipsy, do not panic, simply call your veterinarian for dosing advice prior to giving the next dose and be sure to tell them if your pet received any supplements or over the counter products not prescribed as a part of their protocol. Odds are, your pet's body is just getting used to the medication, they will sleep it off and be right back to normal in no time at all!



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My pet had home medications, do they also need injectable medication at the visit?

- Some pets still will require injectable sedation for the type of thorough examination, treatment, or surgical procedure they need- taking anxiety medications at home allows the veterinary team to administer lower doses of that sedation, allows that sedation to work more effectively, and allows your pet to experience less stress when they receive that sedation.
- Sometimes a pet's level of anxiety is so high that it actually overrides or greatly reduces the effectiveness of pre-visit anxiety medications. It's as if, once your pet gets scared, it's brain literally forgets the anxiety medication and goes into a high "fight or flight" response. For these pets, it is important to know that keeping them from this stressful flight or flight response is important for their safety. To keep them safest (from extreme stress hormone levels) is to give them both oral pre-visit anxiety medications and injectable sedation medications during the visit.
- Most injectable sedation protocols are reversible and/or short-acting and your pet will still be able to walk to your car at the end of the visit!

LAST MINUTE REMINDERS FOR PETS WITH FEAR OR ANXIETY

- Please be sure to bring your pet in a carrier that has snap latches so the top can be taken off or have them on a leash.
- Please play calming music or an audio book with a calm voice in the car and talk in a normal voice to try to keep them from playing on any nervousness you may be feeling.
- Do not feed them breakfast the day of their visit and bring along their favorite snacks for the nurses to give them as this helps them want to eat and bond with us because we give them their favorite snack!
- Note that the supplements and pheromones we have sent home are an important part of reducing stress. We also have our building and environment designed to be low stress and our staff specialized in safe low stress handling. Some pets still experience anxiety due to past experiences and, for those pets, once the doctor has established a relationship with you, we can give medication here as an injection to facilitate them being able to have a thorough exam if needed. We will also send home protocols that include medications in addition to these supplements and pheromones so that they can have a better experience and be less frightened or even less car sick next time that they come.

PRE-VISIT SUPPLEMENTS AND PHEROMONES THAT WE RECOMMEND AND USE

-Please note that our doctors need to review any supplements you give your pet to be sure that they don't cross react with any medication prescribed. We encourage you not to give CBC or supplements not in this list without advice from one of our doctors as unexpected medication reactions could occur. We find that the supplements and pheromones below are helpful for many pets and often reduce the amount of pre-visit medications that they need.

- Composure Pro - this natural supplement is more effective than most relaxing supplements on the market and has a good taste! Composure Pro allows us to give less medications overall. If your pet doesn't like the taste or size of Composure Pro, you may crush it into small pieces and mix with their favorite special treat!
- Feliway Wipes for Cat Carriers- These wipes mimic the happy pheromone (scent) that your cat leaves on areas where they rub their chin. Applying this to the carrier as directed can help your cat more readily accept the carrier and feel more like it is a safe space. One hour before leaving wipe the inside and outside of carrier.
- Melatonin -Using a dose recommend by a veterinarian, melatonin can reduce feelings of anxiety in people and dogs. It is part of the "chill protocol" for our pets who are often so scared that they want to lash out. Melatonin will make your pet sleepy but that effect will wear off by the next day.
- Adaptil Spray for Dogs- This spray mimics the happy pheromone scent mama dogs give off when nursing their puppies. Spraying it on your dog's leash and collar as well as in the car can help them feel calmer and less stressed. One hour before leaving, spray your car seats and interior particularly where your dog will ride, also spray any clothing they will wear with Adaptil following bottle directions.