

PETS & VETS

A checkup can be a tense time for your dog or cat—and you. These strategies make the vet visit more bearable for everyone.

AT HOME

■ KEEP THE CARRIER NEUTRAL

Set it out at least a week before the visit so your pet doesn't associate the carrier only with the vet. Make it comfy: Line it with a fleece blanket, which research shows calms pets more than a towel, says Marty Becker, D.V.M., coauthor of *From Fearful to Fear Free*.

■ **TAKE JOYRIDES** Let your pet tag along to the pet store or on errands to break the association between the car and the vet. For cats, you can put them in the car for trips to the drive-through. Start small by first just backing out of the driveway then giving your pet a treat.

■ **MAKE THE RIDE COMFORTABLE** Cover the carrier with a towel or sheet so only the front is unobstructed. "Pets aren't used to traveling at that speed and seeing the world whiz by," Becker says. Also precool or preheat the car.

AT THE VET

■ **WAIT IN THE CAR** Waiting rooms can bring out the worst in pets because they smell the fear hormones from every animal who has been there; lots of people and noise worsens things. So ask if you can get a text or call when the vet is ready. Not feasible? Keep the carrier covered and, if it fits, on your lap or a chair.

■ ASK ABOUT CHANGING THE EXAM

These techniques can ease stress. Ask if your dog can be examined on a slip-proof mat: on the table if the pet is small, on the floor if the pet is larger. Keeping your cat in the carrier with the top off and the cat covered by a towel helps, says Jill Sackman, D.V.M., Ph.D., head of behavior medicine services at BluePearl Veterinary Partners in locations across Michigan.

TOOLS TO RELAX

1

■ PHEROMONES

You can buy products mimicking these hormones that cats and dogs (and humans) give off, which can be calming for pets. Use a wipe or spray on blankets in carriers and/or run a diffuser with pheromones before you leave the house.

2

■ MUSIC

Quiet classical and reggae have been proven to relax pets, Becker says. Play the CD *A Sound Beginning* or one by ICalmPet; a book on tape, which has a calming rhythm, works, too. ■

“WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM THE VISIT, LET YOUR PET SETTLE DOWN IN HER CARRIER IN A QUIET ROOM.”



VETERINARIAN MARTY BECKER

