The Importance of Carrier Training your Cat

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Often at Turramurra Veterinary Hospital we hear tales from clients about difficulty catching their cats prior to their appointments. Stories we hear most frequently tend to reiterate **anxiety, aggression, or fear** in their cats at the concept of being put in their cat carrier. Much like teaching a family dog to sit and stay, **training your cat to travel calmly** will do wonders for not only their anxiety levels, but yours too!

Carrier training will help to:

- **Decrease stress** associated with **veterinary visits**
- Ensure your cat is **more likely to be seen and treated for medical conditions early**
- Ensure they are **safely contained** in case of an emergency
- Allow for **easier travel** to and from your home
- Decrease stress levels in **your cat when boarding or hospitalised**

Training your cat to feel relaxed and comfortable in their carrier will be beneficial for many reasons, such as decreasing anxiety and ensuring comfort while traveling.

To start, it is important to **find the right carrier** for your cat. The carrier should be **large enough** for your cat to **stand and turn around comfortably**, with **secure footing**. Look for one with an **opening at the top**, this makes it easier to keep your cat comfortable during veterinary examinations. Line the carrier with a bath towel, newspaper, or absorbent pad in case of a toileting accident. Using a veterinary recommended pheromone spray such as **Feliway**, will aid in alleviating fear and stress your cat may have towards travelling in the carrier.

Patience and understanding are key when introducing your cat to its carrier.

Here are **10 top tips** to help your cat have a positive association with the carrier:

1. Make the carrier a **part of your home environment**. If it is out all the time, it will **no longer be a strange object** associated with a scary event (e.g. travelling in a car to the vet).

2. Line the bottom of the carrier with **soft bedding**. If your carrier comes apart, start with the base section only. Place it in an area your cat frequently chooses to rest, such as a sun-soaked location or your own workspace.
3. Leave **treats in the carrier** for your cat to **discover on their own**.
4. Once you notice your cat spending time in the carrier, try adding the top of the carrier, leaving the door off or permanently open if possible. Continue to **leave treats and toys** in and around the carrier to **create a positive association**.
5. You can **play with toys near or inside the carrier** to encourage your cat to investigate, as well as **using treats and food puzzles**.
6. Play the "**in and out game**", by tossing a treat inside and waiting for your cat to retrieve it. The goal here is for **your cat to choose to wait inside the carrier** for the next treat, **spending time in the carrier voluntarily**.
7. At this stage you can **add the door**. Close it **briefly to begin** with and **build up the duration** of time in a crate with treats and positive reinforcements.

Slow and steady integration will result in decreased stress for your cat. If your cat appears distressed throughout this process, go back a step and start over.

8. **Add movement** by lifting the carrier gently but DO NOT let it swing. **Take a few steps** before releasing your cat. If at this stage your cat does not want to enter the carrier again, return to an earlier step.

9. Once your cat is not unsettled by this movement, you can begin to incorporate car rides. Remember that each cat is different. **Train at your cat's individual pace**.

10. **Cover the carrier** with a lightweight towel or sheet, ensuring sufficient ventilation but allowing your cat to feel secure inside. When you arrive at the vet, keep your cat next to you or at a higher space. **Do not place your cat's carrier on the floor** as this makes them feel particularly vulnerable.

It is very important that while in the car or at the vet your cat is kept safe and contained in a cat carrier to ensure they are protected and to prevent any further anxiety from meeting other animals face to face.