



Start Today:

Small Steps to Becoming More Cat Friendly

Becoming more Cat Friendly does not require a renovation budget or major changes. It starts with a commitment to better understand cats, see the world from their perspective, and make small, thoughtful changes to the practice that reduce distress and improve wellbeing for every cat in your care. Here are just a few ways you can start today.

Pre-appointment

- Educate new cat caregivers in advance of their first appointment to ensure they have a proper carrier and know how to get their cat more comfortable with the carrier so it does not contribute to stressor stacking and cause increased distress before they get to the appointment (See the “Purrfect Journey: A Carrier Guide for Caregivers” brochure at catvets.com/CatFriendly).
- Consider timing — schedule feline appointments during quieter times of the day to minimize noise, activity, and distress.
- Identify one examination room for feline appointments, ideally in the quietest part of the practice (e.g., reduced sound from ringing phones, bell at front door, loud talking from staff congregating in common areas near the room, barking dogs, etc.); consider playing calming classical or cat-specific music.
- Have cat caregivers wait in their car until the examination room is ready to avoid time in the waiting area.
- If they must spend time in the waiting area, try to section off a small space that is only for cats that does not face other pets and has a place to keep the carrier off the ground; provide a towel/blanket sprayed with synthetic feline pheromones when they walk through the door.
- Whenever possible, schedule cats separately from other pets, including cats from the same household. Some closely affiliated cats may benefit from remaining together, but should not be scheduled or examined together if there is tension between them at home or during or after veterinary visits.
- Have all items you will need in the examination room to avoid going in and out, which can increase the cat’s fear-anxiety.
- Keep a set of cat-only supplies such as an ophthalmoscope, stethoscope, variety of treats, etc. (See the Cat Friendly Veterinary Environment Guidelines [Box 5] for a full list, catvets.com/environment).
- Put a non-slip mat or towel/blanket over all cold and slippery surfaces, especially examination tables and the scale (having a small animal or infant scale is recommended). Consider providing a high-sided cat bed for comfort and security.
- Have at least two blankets/towels sprayed with synthetic feline pheromones ready for the appointment.
- Practice gentle handling skills and identification of feline emotions (especially protective emotions like fear-anxiety, pain, and frustration) so the team knows when to take a break and adjust the appointment.
- Change your jacket/scrubs if you have interacted with another species or after a cat with significant distress to avoid transferring these scents.

Learn more about the “why” behind these recommendations in the accompanying Cat Friendly handouts: “Current Feline Interactions and Handling Recommendations” and “Creating a Better Veterinary Environment and Experience for Cats” at catvets.com/CatFriendly



During the Appointment

- Before you do anything, give the cat time to acclimate to the room and to you (open the carrier door and let the cat choose to come out); never dump or pull the cat out of the carrier.
- Allow cats a place to hide (bottom of carrier, under a towel, etc.).
- Examine in whatever location the cat seems to prefer (floor, table, lap, bottom of carrier, etc.).
- Keep voices quiet and calm.
- Avoid strong scents (strong or scented cleaners, perfumes, alcohol wipes, etc.) as much as possible; use synthetic feline pheromone diffusers.
- Clean the room thoroughly between patients. Cats have an excellent sense of smell, and odors/pheromones from previous patients may be alarming and cause increased arousal.
- Give breaks during the physical examination, especially if the cat is showing signs of escalating protective emotions.
- Offer lots of treats, if appropriate for the appointment, which can be used for distraction and positive reinforcement (have a variety available).
- You do not have to go nose-to-tail in the physical examination; save what the cat likes the least until last (and document this in the records for future appointments).
- Avoid taking the cat out of the room unless absolutely necessary (if required, the cat must be provided with time to acclimate to the new room and team members; avoid loud treatment areas).
- Minimize the number of people in the room; remember that trust is not transferrable and each team member will need to build rapport before handling the cat.
- Always end on a positive note (e.g., passively providing treats).
- Use Cat Friendly Terminology (see the “Embracing Cat Friendly Language” handout at catvets.com/CatFriendly).

Preparing for the Next Appointment

- Record what worked well for the cat for future visits with as much detail as possible (e.g., likes chicken-flavored lickable treat while being examined under a towel in the bottom of their carrier); this is especially important for a locum/relief veterinarian or a new team member who is not familiar with the cat.
- Ask the caregiver about the pre-visit experience and offer recommendations for future visits. Document any challenges and review them during appointment confirmation calls to determine whether accommodations or pre-visit medications may be needed.

During Hospitalization

- Ideally the cat ward is separated from dogs and other loud areas of the practice; if not, position cats as far away from dogs as possible and incorporate sound proofing/noise reduction materials.
- Schedule procedures to minimize time with both species in the ward; for example, perform cat surgeries in the morning and discharge patients as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Monitor cats recovering from procedures closely in carriers/collapsible cages or mobile cages elevated off the floor in areas with no dogs, if separation within the hospital is not possible.
- Move distressed/noisy animals to another location, if possible.
- Ensure each cat has somewhere to hide within their cage. If cats use the hiding option, try to examine and treat the cat within the cage. If cats must be removed from their cage, take their preferred hiding option with them.
- Prevent clinic cats from interacting with patients in the ward (or waiting area), either directly or visually from a distance.
- Avoid the sight of dogs and other cats by:
 - Covering, or partially covering, the front of each cage (e.g., with a towel) to reduce or eliminate visual contact (if the cat does not need to be monitored closely).
 - Using room dividing screens, blinds, or curtains.
 - Housing cats in a mobile bank of cages on wheels that can be rotated away from dogs.

Cat Friendly Pro Tips

- Identify a Cat Friendly team member who can champion these techniques in the practice.
- Take the **FelineVMA Cat Friendly Certificate Program** to expand upon these skills (catvets.com/certificate).
- Want to go the extra mile? **Become a Cat Friendly Practice®** (catvets.com/CFP).