



Creating a Better Veterinary Environment and Experience for Cats: Quick Guide

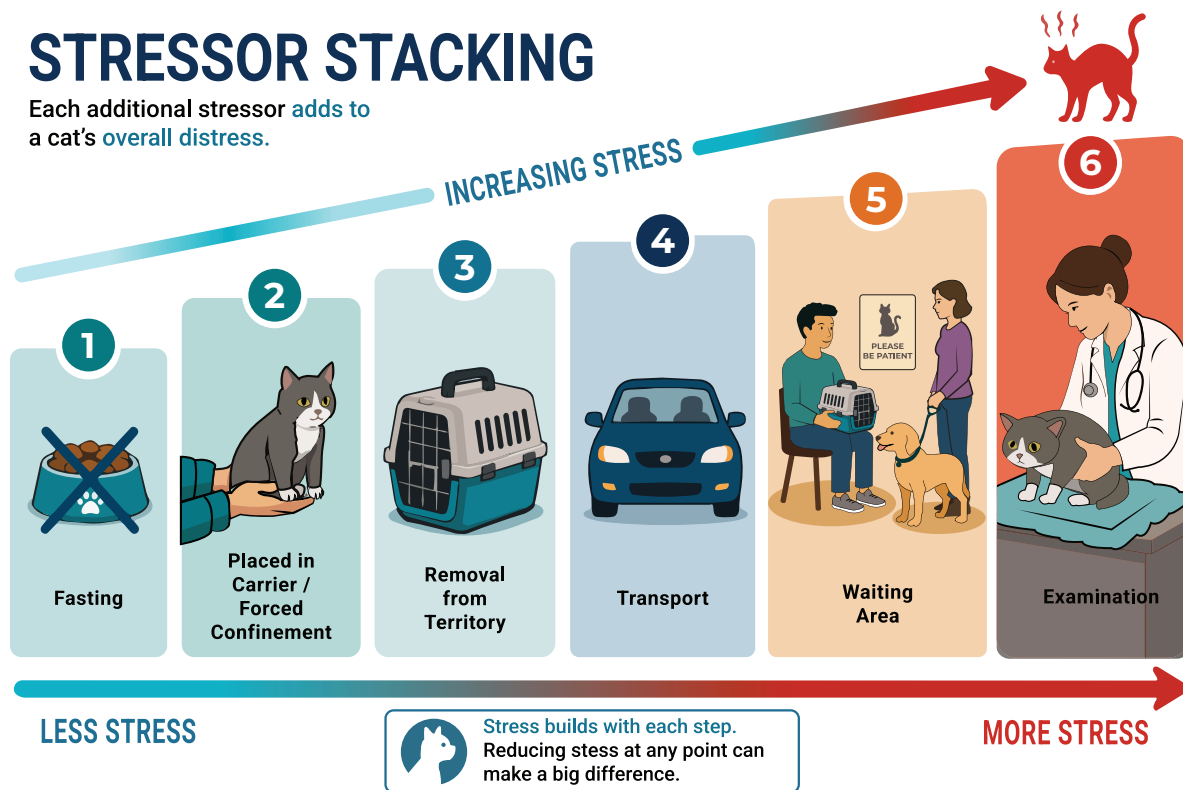
Cats rely on their senses to assess safety. Unfamiliar odors, noises, movements, handling, or the presence of other animals can increase protective emotions and behavioral responses. Reducing sensory arousal and supporting a cat's sense of control helps create a better veterinary experience.

Stressor Stacking

Stressor stacking occurs when multiple stressors accumulate throughout the veterinary visit, reducing a cat's ability to cope. Preventing stressor stacking by minimizing sensory arousal, supporting choice and control, decreasing protective emotions, and using gentle handling helps create a more positive experience for cats, caregivers, and veterinary teams.

STRESSOR STACKING

Each additional stressor **adds to** a cat's **overall distress**.



Waiting Area & Arrival

Why: Waiting areas expose cats to unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells, and other animals.

When: Every feline visit.

How:

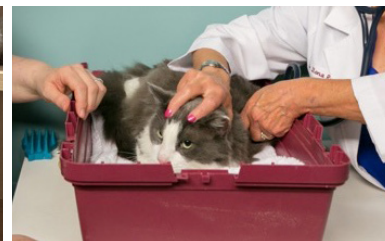
- Provide separate cat waiting spaces using dividers or screens; bring cats directly to the exam room (ask clients to wait in temperature-controlled car until it is available); cover carriers, offer cat-only appointment times; provide elevated carrier placement; minimize wait times. Ensure no contact between feline patients and a resident/clinic cat.
- Advise caregivers to cover the carrier with a familiar scented or one sprayed with synthetic feline pheromones; provide when they enter the practice if they do not arrive with a cover.

Examination Room

Why: A prepared, quiet environment reduces sensory arousal and distress.

When: Every feline exam.

How: Use cat-only rooms when possible; remove strong odors and reduce noises from barking dogs, noisy spaces, and areas where staff/clients congregate; prepare supplies in advance to minimize going in and out of the room (including towels sprayed with feline synthetic pheromones); provide hiding, perching, and comfortable resting options; provide a soft surface for the exam; have a variety of treats available; give cats the choice to be examined in their preferred location and position (e.g., bottom of carrier, bench, high-sided cat bed, floor, perch; sitting, standing, lying down).



Permission provided by: Bianca/stock.adobe.com (left), Dr. Paige Garnett (left-center), Dr. Tina Hall (right-center), FelineVMA (right)

Supporting Choice & Control

Why: Choice increases a cat's sense of safety and reduces fear-anxiety and pain.

When: Every feline exam whenever medically appropriate.

How: Allow voluntary carrier exit; observe before handling; examine cats where they choose to be; adjust your approach if the cat's emotions change; weigh cats with minimal handling.

Handling & Procedures

Why: Restraint increases protective emotions, undesirable behavioral responses, and negatively impacts welfare.

When: During all exams, diagnostics, procedures, and treatments.

How: All veterinary teams should develop an understanding of cats' unique interaction and handling needs and practice these techniques. Use gentle cooperative handling; avoid looming or forcing movement; offer hiding opportunities, breaks, treats, and rewards; use analgesia, anxiolytics, or sedation when indicated. Read more – Cat Friendly Veterinary Interactions Guidelines.

Hospitalization & Wards

Why: Hospitalization can increase sensory arousal and loss of control.

When: All hospitalized cats.

How: Separate cats from dogs when possible; cages should not be facing other animals (or partially cover cages with towels, sheer drapes, or a shower curtain to provide visual barriers); provide hiding spaces, perches, soft bedding, and familiar scents; minimize handling ('spot clean' soiled areas to allow the cat's scent to remain); allow caregiver visits when appropriate; maintain comfortable temperatures and lighting.

Synthetic Feline Pheromones

Why: Help create a sense of familiarity and safety.

When: Before, during, and after the visit.

How: Use in waiting areas, exam rooms, and wards; spray 15-30 minutes prior on towels, bedding, carriers, and cages; plug in diffusers 24+ hours before appointments.

Client & Team Education

Why: Consistency improves feline welfare, caregiver compliance, and visit success.

When: Before, during, and after every visit.

How: Educate caregivers about carrier training, pre-visit medications, and post-visit reintegration; train teams on feline behavior, signs of distress (and how to avoid stressor stacking) and Cat Friendly care; monitor distress and adjust the approach for each cat; use positive reinforcement and distractions; record successful handling strategies and preferences for future visits.

To read the full handout with additional details, visit catvets.com/CatFriendly.



Cat Friendly Veterinary Interaction Guidelines — catvets.com/interaction
Cat Friendly Veterinary Environment Guidelines — catvets.com/environment