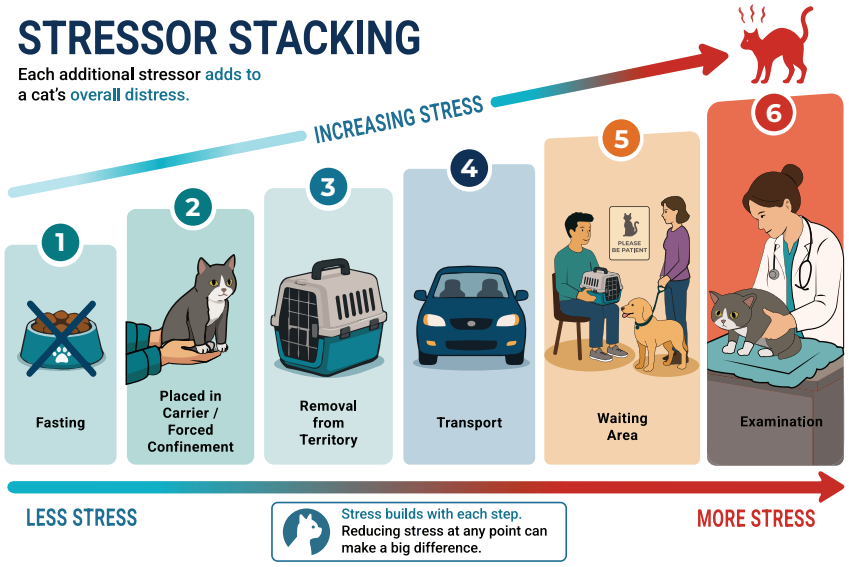
Cat Friendly
The Standards of Feline Care



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

Cats rely on their senses to assess safety. Unfamiliar odors, noises, movements, handling, and/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 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.



Waiting Area & Arrival

Why: Waiting areas expose cats to unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells, and other animals.	**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 the room 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 towel or one sprayed with synthetic feline pheromones; provide when they enter the practice if they do not arrive with a cover.
When: Every feline visit.	







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

Examination Room

Why: A prepared, quiet environment reduces sensory arousal and distress.	**How:** Use cat-only rooms when possible; remove strong odors and reduce noises from barking dogs, loud 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).
When: Every feline exam.	

Supporting Choice & Control

Why: Choice increases a cat's sense of safety and reduces fear-anxiety and pain.	**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.
When: Every feline exam whenever medically appropriate.	

Handling & Procedures

Why: Restraint increases protective emotions and undesirable behavioral responses, and negatively impacts welfare.	**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; avoid forcing movement; offer hiding opportunities, breaks, treats, and rewards; monitor distress and adjust the approach for each cat; use positive reinforcement and distractions; use analgesia, anxiolytics, or sedation when indicated. Read more in the Cat Friendly Veterinary Interactions Guidelines – **catvets.com/interaction**.
When: During all exams, diagnostics, procedures, and treatments.	

Hospitalization & Wards

Why: Hospitalization can increase sensory arousal and loss of control.	**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.
When: All hospitalized cats.	

Synthetic Feline Pheromones

Why: Helps create a sense of familiarity and safety.	**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.
When: Before, during, and after the visit.	

Client & Team Education

Why: Consistency improves feline welfare, caregiver compliance, and visit success.	**How:** Educate caregivers about carrier training, pre-visit medications, and post-visit reintegration; train teams on feline behavior, signs of distress, how to avoid stressor stacking, and Cat Friendly care; record successful handling strategies and preferences for future visits.
When: Before, during, and after every visit.	

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

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

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