“Stressor Stacking” During the Veterinary Visit

Cat Friendly
The Standards of Feline Care
Feline Veterinary Medical Association

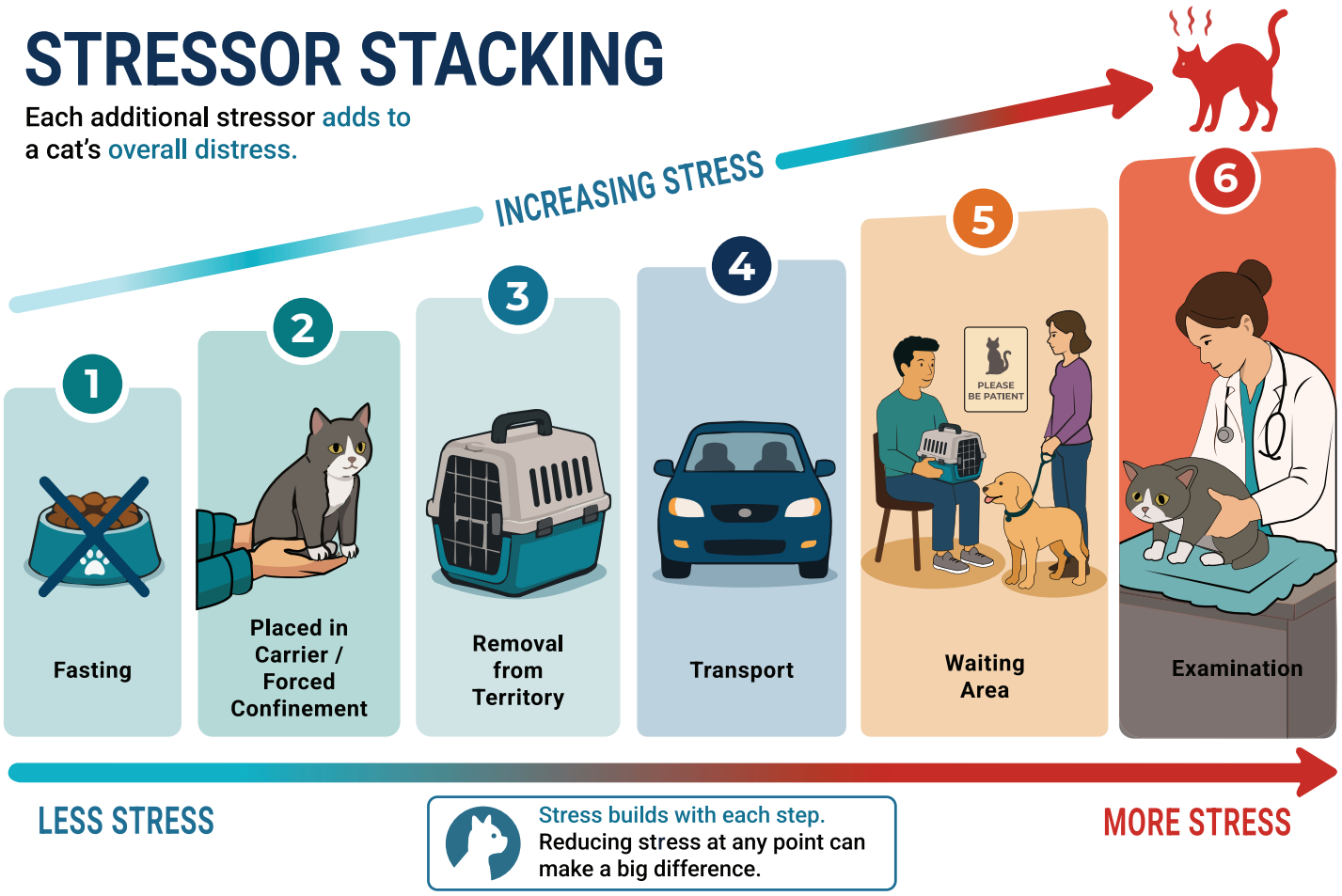
A cat’s coping ability is influenced by both the number and intensity of that cat’s perceived stressors. For example, cats may cope with being temporarily confined in their carriers at home, but when compounded by enforced confinement, fasting, removal from their territory, transport, sensory stimuli in the waiting area, restraint or handling that is not gentle and often painful, and removal of their sense of security/control, stressor stacking is experienced. This often results in cats being unable to cope and consequently showing signs of protective (negative) emotions and behavioral responses.

Stressor stacking will continue not only during the cat’s visit (e.g., in response to the environment, physical examination, sample collection, treatments, and/or hospitalization), but even at home (e.g., medication administration, reintegrating with the other household cats). This creates a negative experience for the cat (who will remember it at the next appointment).

Fortunately, small changes to reduce carrier/transport stress, within the practice environment, and among veterinary team interactions with feline patients can minimize stressor stacking and result in positive experiences for the cat, caregiver, and veterinary team

STRESSOR STACKING

Each additional stressor adds to a cat’s overall distress.



Stress builds with each step.
Reducing stress at any point can make a big difference.

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