

8 Ways to Get Kitty to Love the Carrier

BY RITA REIMERS & LINDA HALL



You're as silent as can be, sneaking around your house preparing the cat carrier for a dreaded visit to the veterinarian. There's no way your cat heard you or knows what's going on, right? Wrong!

I don't know how, but cats always know when the carrier comes out, no matter how quiet you are. They hide anywhere you can think of — even places you can't think of. Whenever a cat senses that something is happening, those feline survival instincts tell cats to run away and hide.

However, there is hope. We have ways you can get your cat to not fear, and maybe even love, his carrier.

Why cats hate carriers

Right now, the cat carrier means something negative to your cat. It comes out, and he dreads it because he associates it with bad events like visiting the veterinarian. So, he avoids it and even runs from it when he sees or smells it.

Even if you manage to find your cat and pick him up without being scratched, the worst part is yet to come: getting him inside the darn thing.

The carrier can be a place of fear for your cat for these reasons:

- ✦ The carrier never comes out unless it's time to go to the vet, and your cat remembers that experience. Not a happy one!

- ✦ The carrier is often put away in a garage, closet or attic, so it smells strange, unlike the familiar house.

- ✦ Cats hate change, and his environment was just altered because you brought "that thing" into his abode.

- ✦ It's scary being stuffed into a small space when it is not your cat's choice.

8 tips for carrier comfort

Changing your cat's perception of the carrier from a negative to a positive space by using the below tips will work wonders toward getting him to accept it without fear. If the carrier is thought of as an appealing place of comfort and pleasant activities, your cat will begin to associate it with good events. The carrier may even become a safe place for retreating and taking naps.

- 1. Use a top-loading carrier:** At home, have your cat enter and exit from the front opening on the carrier. It's easy to place him into the carrier, if there's also an opening on top.

- 2. Leave the carrier out all the time:** It will become part of your cat's environment, and he won't be tipped off to a vet visit when you get it out.

- 3. Use catnip or calming remedies:** Sprinkle the carrier with catnip to entice your cat inside. Herbal calming remedies can also help your cat to relax near the carrier.

- 4. Make it a place to play:** Once your cat has been inside the carrier, use play to get him to go in and out of it regularly. Toss soft toys or dangle a fishing pole type toy to lure him in.

- 5. Reward with treats:** During play-time, toss some treats into the carrier so your cat chases after them. Once he gets his treat reward, praise him for being inside the carrier.

- 6. Make it a dining spot:** As your cat gets more comfortable, give him meals inside the carrier. If he will eat inside the carrier, he has decided it's a good place to be.

- 7. Add comfort items:** Add a soft blanket and some of your cat's favorite plush toys, things he can curl up with for comfort. You may have just created his favorite new napping spot.

- 8. Consider clicker training:** Clicker training is a great way to teach your cat to enter the carrier by himself on command. Wouldn't it be nice to just say, "Go to your carrier" and have him go on command?

Now that your cat has accepted the carrier, and maybe even loves being inside it, getting ready for the trip to the veterinarian will be a snap. No more last-minute cancellations for you. Your vet, your stress level and your wallet will all be much better for it. 🐾



Rita Reimers and **Linda Hall** are co-founders of The Cat Behavior Alliance, offering a unique Duo-Approach to cat behavior correction. Visit them at CatBehaviorAlliance.com for more information. You can also find Rita and Linda on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok @CatBehaviorAlliance.



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