

# How to Have a Feline-Friendly Practice

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WEB-EXCLUSIVE

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 Print/View Handout



It is worth stating again: Cats are *not* small dogs! Treating cats is critical to a veterinary practice's success and no one can afford to handle and treat cats the same as dogs.

Misconceptions and biases about cats (and their owners) mean they often do not get the care they need and deserve and practices lose revenue.

*Related Article: Improving Feline Veterinary Experiences*

[<http://www.veterinaryteambrief.com/article/improving-feline-veterinary-experiences>]

Consider the following ways in which cats are underserved. How are cats treated in your practice?

- When clients visit with their dogs, do you ask about and suggest care for their feline friends at home?
- Is your practice a cat-neutral or cat-unfriendly environment (eg, a small lobby with no space to separate dogs and cats, having house cats in the lobby or kennels, taking cats to the treatment room to obtain laboratory samples, housing cats and dogs together)?
- Are cats underrepresented in your marketing/social media presence and practice décor?
- Is osteoarthritis, which occurs in up to 61% of cats 6 years of age or older,<sup>1</sup> on your radar?
- Does your team strive to provide stress-free—or at least lower-stress—practice visits for clients and cats?

## Seek to Understand

Rethink how cats are perceived. They are *not* fractious or crazy. They *are* fearful and reluctant. Rethink their owners as well, using the same descriptions.

Consider cats' feelings and experiences. They are trapped in a carrier and surrounded by other cats and barking, sniffing dogs, and perhaps curious children—all before seeing the veterinarian. It is no wonder they are fearful and reluctant.

It is important that clients understand the importance of teaching cats to allow being handled, regardless of age, just as with puppies

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*Veterinary Team Brief* delivers practical skills for team-based medicine—with clinical strategies for team training, peer-reviewed credibility, concise content, essential training modules, and easy-to-implement protocols. From the publisher of *Clinician's Brief*.

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feline-friendly practices.

*Related Article: Cat-Friendly Practices: Conversation Opportunities* [<http://www.veterinaryteambrief.com/article/cat-friendly-practices-conversation->

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## Seek a Deeper Understanding

Becoming feline-friendly is not hard (See **Tips for Creating a Feline-Friendly Practice** and **Tools & Resources for a Feline-Friendly Practice**), but it does require a different approach, dedication, effort, and practice. However, the payoff will be consistency, credibility, loyal clients, and happier cats.

Download **Action Plan for a “Cat-tastic” Practice** [[http://www.veterinaryteambrief.com/sites/default/files/attachments/Veterinary%20Team%20Brief\\_Action%20Plan%20for%20a%20Cat-tastic%20Practice.pdf](http://www.veterinaryteambrief.com/sites/default/files/attachments/Veterinary%20Team%20Brief_Action%20Plan%20for%20a%20Cat-tastic%20Practice.pdf)]

## Tips for Creating a Feline-Friendly Practice

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Training that is made interesting always is more successful. Karen Lawson's *The Trainer's Handbook*<sup>2</sup> is an excellent resource to hone training skills and use team games that make training fun. In addition to the following suggestions, adapt common games such as Jeopardy and Pictionary, make up your own games, or look for other effective training tools on the internet.

- Give positive talking points to team members so they anticipate and are ready for client and team member objections to feline veterinary care.
- Use videos and photos that depict feline body language, such as facial changes and body posture that indicate escalating fear.
- Obtain the cat's history without touching or looking at the cat to give it time to acclimate to your presence. Combining the history and examination in an attempt to shorten the visit does not achieve the goal of making it easier for the cat.<sup>3</sup>
- Use pheromones in all practice areas where cats are treated.<sup>4</sup>
- Use yoga mats on examination tables.
- Explain that a cat's wet paw prints are a sign of fear and not the feline version of sweating.
- Use distraction techniques (eg, treats, toys) to prevent or minimize stress.
- Teach gentle restraint techniques that do not involve scruffing, which is now believed to cause more stress than necessary.<sup>3</sup>
- Keep up with current trends with cats—social and medical.

## Tools & Resources for a Feline-Friendly Practice

Whether the practice goal is to become an [AAFP Cat Friendly Practice](http://www.catvets.com/cfp/cfp) or simply to increase feline visits, check out the following resources.

- Develop CE sessions and learning games from these articles funded by a Zoetis educational grant: [Cat Care in Crisis: A DVM360 Leadership Challenge](http://veterinarynews.dvm360.com/cat-care-crisis-dvm360-leadership-challenge). Catch the Google Hangout video at the end of the series—it is a full hour, but well worth the time.
- Use these resources at team meetings and incorporate them in training programs:
  - [CATalyst Council's Cat-Friendly Practice](http://goo.gl/1p3U4T)
  - [Partnership for Healthy Pets - Your Toolbox](http://ow.ly/y1UWs)
  - [Improving Feline Veterinary Experiences](http://goo.gl/jza5oh)
  - [American Association of Feline Practitioners' \(AAFP\) Cat Friendly Practice program](http://goo.gl/rG6eyi)
  - [2012 AAFP/ISFM Feline-Friendly Nursing Care Guidelines](http://goo.gl/2K0L0l%20%20%20%20)
  - [2011 AAFP/ISFM Feline-Friendly Handling Guidelines](http://goo.gl/EDwe3b)
  - [Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study III: Feline Findings](http://ow.ly/y1V92)
  - [2015 AAHA Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines](http://goo.gl/q1bmES%20)

1. Slingerland LI, Hazewinkel HAW, Meij BP, Picavet P, Voorhout G. Cross-sectional study of the prevalence and clinical features of osteoarthritis in 100 cats. *Vet J*. 2011;187(3):304-309.
2. Lawson K. *The Trainer's Handbook*. 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Pfeiffer; 2009.
3. Hammerle M, Horst C, Levine E, Overall K, Radosta L, Rafter-Ritchie M, et al. 2015 AAHA Canine and Feline Behavior Management Guidelines. *JAAHA*. 2015;51(4):205-221.
4. Mills DS, Dube MB, Zulch H. *Stress and Pheromonotherapy in Small Animal Clinical Behavior*. 1st ed. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell; 2013;370.

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# Action Plan for a Cat-tastic Practice

<b>Receptionist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be a cheerleader for the care and comfort of cats!</li><li>• Use a calm, quiet voice.</li><li>• Share carrier training tips with clients.</li><li>• Ask clients not to feed their cats before practice visits so that treats are more enticing and distracting. Be sure to let clients know the goal.</li><li>• Spray pheromones on towels and give them to clients to cover the carrier to help keep the cat calm if there is a delay in getting to the examination room.</li><li>• Schedule appointments and collect payment in the examination room to minimize the cat's exposure to other people and patients.</li></ul>
<b>Veterinary Technician &amp; Veterinary Assistant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Become a master of calm and distraction. Anticipate stress and prevent its escalation.</li><li>• Enter the examination room prepared, and minimize traffic in and out of the room.</li><li>• Avoid pouring or extracting cats from their carriers.</li><li>• Avoid scruffing—use other gentle restraint methods (eg, consider calming clips [eg, Clipnosis]).</li><li>• Use pheromones on scrubs and restraint towels.</li><li>• Ask clients questions that will draw out any signs of problems such as arthritis, diabetes, and hyperthyroidism.</li></ul>
<b>Kennel Attendant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide comfortable housing with a private area or perch.</li><li>• Keep lighting low and noise to a minimum.</li><li>• Do not replace bedding unless it is soiled or wet because cats take comfort in familiar scents (especially their own).</li><li>• Carry cats safely and use low-stress handling methods.</li></ul>
<b>Practice Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find the practice's cat champions.</li><li>• Add cats to the practice décor.</li><li>• Give cats equal billing in social media.</li><li>• Provide training and materials that create a feline-friendly practice.</li><li>• Purchase soft mats for examination tables and pheromone diffusers for cat areas.</li><li>• Share historical statistics on feline visits and specify new goals for the practice. Track and share the practice's progress with the team.</li><li>• Plan for resistance and naysayers. Anticipate how to overcome pushback.</li><li>• Be patient and persistent.</li></ul>
<b>Veterinarian &amp; Practice Owner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support the feline-friendly practice mission.</li><li>• Attend team meetings and set the example for the team's treatment of cats and owners.</li><li>• Teach the team about feline behavior, medical needs, diseases, and treatments.</li><li>• Use pheromones on laboratory coats and scrubs.</li><li>• Examine cats in a carrier or on a soft mat.</li><li>• Whenever possible, seize the opportunity to help a cat recover from previously stressful visits.</li></ul>