

Teaching Your Cat to Love Being Handled

It can be very challenging to have a cat that doesn't like to be handled. Giving medications, doing nail trims, and brushing teeth can turn into a battle. It is also important to be aware that this can progress into bigger problems for you and your cat. A surprise tail pull, paw grab, or well-meaning hug from a child could potentially make your cat uncomfortable enough to bite or scratch. Positively conditioning your cat to enjoy veterinary handling and touch is invaluable.

The majority of kittens do not usually have a negative emotional response to veterinary exams, but introducing touch gradually in a manner that does not produce stress is an important preventative measure.

For veterinary handling and care, we want touch to predict tasty treats, and over time the touch alone will produce a positive emotional response in your cat.

GUIDELINES FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRAINING SESSION

- ✓ Go slow. The point of these training sessions is to teach your cat that veterinary handling can be a fun and predictable game.
- ✓ Timing is everything. Ensure you touch your cat FIRST, stop touching, and then give the treat.
- ✓ Sessions should be short. 2-3 minutes is long enough for kittens, and older cats can often build up to a 5 minute training session.
- ✓ Cats prefer elevated surfaces. Using an easily accessible stool, chair or countertop can be a great training station.
- ✓ Tossing treats away from the station after a few repetitions is a great way to reset and ensure your kitten wants to return to the station.
- ✗ If your pet is displaying any signs of stress, STOP. Go back to a body part that they are comfortable with and end the session on a positive note. For future sessions consider breaking the steps down more for the body part(s) your cat is concerned about.
- ✗ Never start with the part of your cat's body that makes them uncomfortable. Start with the part that is likely to cause the least amount of stress, such as petting their back. Then work up to more potentially stressful body parts such as paws.

A TIP TO TAIL EXAM INCLUDES:

1. Looking in your cat's right and left eye
2. Lifting both the right and left side of their lips to look at their teeth
3. Looking in their right and left ear and looking at their pinna (inside ear flap) and ear canal
4. Gently rubbing their entire body to check for lumps and bumps, including their neck area
5. Lifting their tail to assess their anus (slowly)
6. Lifting one paw at a time to inspect the bottom of their paws
7. A gentle feel of their abdomen from ribs to pelvis
8. Listening to their heart (use a skipping rope or belt and place it on the right and then left side of their chest)

BODY LANGUAGE THAT CAN INDICATE STRESS

- Ears back or flicking
- Tail tucked under or close to the body
- Crouched posture
- Dilated pupils
- Lip licking
- Averted gaze
- Rapid blinking
- Tail flick
- Moving away from approaching hand



THE GOAL OF THESE SESSIONS IS TO HAVE THE VETERINARY EXAM BECOME A FUN AND PREDICTABLE GAME FOR YOUR CAT!

TRAINING SESSION EXAMPLE

1. Lift lip to look at teeth (right side) then give a treat
2. Lift lip to look at teeth (left side) then give a treat
3. Look in ear (right) then give a treat
4. Look in ear (left) then give a treat

You do not need to go through a whole mock exam in one session. Take your time and go at your pet's pace.