

Traveling with Cats

Since your cat is a part of your family and you don't want to leave him behind, here is some information that should help make traveling with your cat easier, safer, and smoother. Before you travel, ask yourself, "Is it safe to take my cat?" While this is something only you and your veterinarian can answer, it helps to also ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my cat have any heart or breathing problems?
- Has my cat ever traveled before?
- Can my cat handle the stress of traveling?
- Would my cat find it less stressful to stay at home with a pet-sitter?

1. **Get information:**

Driving across state lines or flying with your pet involves many regulations that you need to find out before you travel.

- If you are traveling by car, contact the state veterinarian's office (a list can be found [here](#)). Find out the restrictions and requirements for each state you will travel through.
- Visit pet travel websites to find pet-friendly hotels and motels
- If you are traveling by plane, call your airline to find out the pet travel policies
- Look up emergency vet clinics along the route of your trip
- An alternative to taking your cat with you is hiring a pet transport company

2. **See your veterinarian:**

Make an appointment to get a health certificate for your cat. Requirements vary by state, but you usually need to get a certificate 7-10 days prior to traveling.

- Tell your vet the travel requirements you discovered
- Get your cat microchipped to improve chances of recovery should your cat get lost. If you travel outside the USA, make sure the microchip is readable abroad.
- Questions to ask the veterinarian include:
 - Is my cat healthy enough to travel?
 - Is my cat current on vaccines?
 - How do I refill my cat's medications (if any) while I am traveling?
 - How will I know if my cat is stressed or needs emergency care?
 - Can I get a copy of my cat's records to take with me?
 - Do you recommend any medication to make the trip easier for my cat?

3. **Start preparing your cat:**

- Purchase a collar tag that lists your cell phone, address and a friend's phone
- Leave your cat carrier out filled with toys, treats, and a soft blanket
- Feed your cat in the carrier
- Get your cat used to going on short car trips in the carrier
- If you plan to use medications, do a trial run by giving the drug at home and monitoring your cat's reaction, including how long the sedation lasts

4. **Prepare your supplies:**

Always have extras and be prepared for an emergency.

- Have an animal first aid kit readily available
- Check that carrier is clean, in working order, and labeled clearly with contact information
- Pack enough food, water, medication, blankets/towels, and litter for several days longer than you plan to travel
- Obtain a litterbox and food/water dishes that fit inside the carrier
- Collect all your papers into a binder (Health Certificate, medical records, travel information, emergency numbers) and have the binder readily available
- Pack cleaning supplies: paper towels, trash bags, and disinfectant

5. **While you are traveling:**

- Make sure the carrier is securely attached to the seat and out of direct sunlight
- Ensure that your cat always has plenty of water and a place to hide
- Keep the car at a comfortable temperature
- Let your cat out to stretch and to use the litterbox during rest stops. However, don't open the car doors or windows while the cat is loose.
- Don't leave your cat alone in the car. The temperature can quickly rise to fatal levels.
- Check on your cat fairly often and watch for signs of stress (excessive vocalizing, panting, or hiding)

6. **Using medications**

While some cats travel may travel better with sedation or antianxiety medication, please consider:

- It's generally safer for your pet to travel without medications
- You must know how your cat reacts to the medication before traveling
- Sedatives affect temperature regulation, increasing risk of overheating or freezing
- Sedatives may wear off in the middle of the trip
- A non-medical product to potentially reduce stress is Feliway®, a synthetic pheromone. As with medications, see how your cat reacts to it before traveling. Use as directed on the package.

Remember only you and your veterinarian can decide what is best for your cat.

Further reading

"What You Should Know About Traveling with Your Pet"

www.avma.org/communications/brochures/traveling/traveling_brochure.asp

*Handout created as part of a class exercise by veterinary students:
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Clinical Animal Behavior Service

www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small_animal/behavior