

# Is Your Cat Ready for the Road?

Traveling with your feline can be challenging, but discover the essential tips, tricks and precautions that can turn a stressful journey into a smooth and safe adventure for you and your cat.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Most cats don't like to travel even short distances, so unless you have a compelling reason for bringing your cat on a road trip, it's best to leave her home, safe in her own environment with a caretaker or frequent visits from a pet sitter
- If you do find it necessary to travel with your kitty by car, the safest way to do it is to purchase a carrier and get your cat used to it long before you leave on your trip
- Once your cat is reasonably comfortable in her crate at home, the next step is to take her on short rides to get her used to being in the carrier in your vehicle
- Other important tips for traveling with your cat include making sure he's wearing an up-to-date ID tag, preparing both a travel kit and first aid kit for her, and bringing along a litterbox and scooping/cleaning supplies
- Despite your best efforts, chances are your kitty will hate car trips (since most do); however, there are several natural remedies available that can be beneficial in reducing the stress kitties feel while traveling

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Traveling with a pet can be stressful, especially in the case of cats. In fact, unless you have a very compelling reason for bringing kitty along on your road trip, it's best not to do it. Unless your cat happens to like car rides — and actually, there are some cats who do — it would be better to leave him in his own environment, which is at home.

Leaving your feline family member at home with a caring and responsible pet sitter is ideal. The next best option would be to leave him with a competent friend or family member, and as a last option, a boarding facility that focuses on cats. Of course, if you're moving from one location to another, your pet must move with you. In that case, you'll need to prepare ahead of time for the challenges of traveling with a feline.

## The Safest Way to Travel with Cats

It's always safest to keep your cat in a well-ventilated carrier when she's in your vehicle. It may seem like punishment, but not when you consider that most kitties just don't travel well. They wind up cowering on the floorboards of moving vehicles. Or they find a way to get stuck up inside one of the seats. Or they move frantically from the front seat to the back seat, back and forth, back and forth. So traveling with kitty in a carrier is the lesser of evils.

And even though most cats fight being put into a carrier, once they're in it and in unfamiliar surroundings — let's say your vehicle or a hotel room — they're actually quite happy to be in a secure, small environment. Try to view the carrier as your pet's safe, cozy spot during travel rather than a jail cell.

## Choosing a Carrier

There are many types of crates to choose from, including wire mesh enclosures, hard plastic, and soft-sided carriers. Whatever type you choose, it needs to be large enough for your cat to stand, sit, lay down, and turn around in. If you have more than one kitty traveling with you, you can opt to select a carrier that's roomy enough for both of them. But if they aren't best friends, provide a carrier for each of them.

It's best to buy the carrier well in advance and get your cat as comfortable with it as possible at home. Put it in your cat's favorite room and leave the door open. Entice her to go into the carrier on her own with food treats, toys, and comfy bedding. You can even try feeding her in there to help her view the carrier as a non-threatening space.

Once she isn't afraid to be in the carrier, zip her in and relocate carrier and cat to another room.

## Getting Kitty Used to the Carrier in the Car

When your cat gets used to being inside the carrier and moving around the house, it's time to take him on short drives. Secure the carrier in your vehicle so it won't move around while you're traveling.

Some cats get car sick, others don't like the sound or feel of the wind when car windows are down. Some kitties also do better not seeing the world pass by in a frightening blur. You might want to secure the carrier on the floor of your vehicle or if you have an SUV, in the back storage area, to limit your cat's exposure to some of the sights, sounds and smells that can occur while traveling. Partially covering a wire carrier with a light towel can also help kitties feel more secure in the car.

If your vehicle happens to be a pick-up truck with an open back bed, obviously, don't put your cat back there. Never put a living creature in the back of a pick-up truck.

It's important to make more than just one trip around the block with your cat. You need to take several short, preliminary drives leading up to your trip so you can make adjustments in your car for the carrier if needed. Also check your kitty's reaction to make sure he's adjusting well to the trips.

While you're traveling, leave the radio very low. Don't play a lot of loud, thumping music. Calm, quiet music can be somewhat soothing. Remember not to aim air conditioning or heat vents directly at the carrier.

Gradually increase the length of your test drives to get your cat used to the sensation of being in a carrier inside a moving vehicle.

## Important Travel Tips

- Make sure your cat is wearing a **collar with a current ID tag**. If she's microchipped, make sure the information is current in the microchip company's database.

- It's important when you travel to put together a **travel kit for your pet**. Include appropriate paperwork. Your veterinarian can advise you, if you're traveling out of the country, what documents you will need. Your kit should include food, fresh bottled water, bowls, treats, a harness and leash, and any supplements or medications your kitty is taking.
- Needless to say, a **first aid kit for emergencies** is a good idea. You can include a comb, some toys, and, of course, bedding. It's also an excellent idea to include some recent pictures of your cat from various angles that would show any unique markings or any unique characteristics about her in the event she gets away from you while traveling.
- If you plan to feed her fresh or raw homemade **food during the trip**, obviously you need to pack an ice chest or some way to keep the food frozen. If you opt to switch to canned food for your journey, it's important you make the dietary transition a week or so before you plan to leave, so you don't encounter any unexpected bouts of diarrhea during your trip.
- Have **clean up supplies** on hand. Sometimes, there are potty accidents or vomit episodes that need cleaning up.
- Most kitties won't use their **litterbox** in a moving vehicle. If you make stops along the way, you can try to entice her to use the box at rest areas. It's important to **have a litterbox available** when you make stops, but it also means that you'll need a litter scoop and some plastic bags for used litter if your cat does decide to take advantage of the litterbox.
- You need to make sure to **never open the cat carrier while there are any car doors or windows, even a sunroof, open**. It's a precaution you should follow religiously at all times when traveling with your cat.
- It's not recommended to try and feed your kitty while the car is moving. Most cats will not eat when there's any type of motion. In fact, the best recommendation is **a light meal a few hours before departure**. If you're traveling some distance and will be staying at a hotel in the evening, feed a second meal once your kitty has settled down in your room for the night. In the morning, feed kitty some breakfast a couple hours before you get back on the road.
- Obviously, you should **never leave your cat unattended in a car** that's not running. It can become very hot or very cold in a matter of minutes.

## Extra Help for Stressed-Out Cats

Despite your best efforts to make your cat comfortable on a road trip, the truth is most kitties are totally stressed out during travel and despise the entire experience.

There are a few natural products that are very beneficial in helping to calm a frightened and very stressed-out cat:

- **Flower essences** — Cats are very sensitive to scents, and **flower essences** are gentle enough to not be offensive, but very beneficial for emotional support. Flower essences are safe to use topically on cats as well as in their water.
- **Herbal remedies and supplements** — Talk to your holistic or integrative veterinarian about specific homeopathics, calming herbs and nutraceuticals that help cats adapt to changes in routines, including calming valerian, L-theanine, ashwagandha, rhodiola, hemp CBD, holy basil (Tulsi) and chamomile.

Some cat owners planning to travel with their pet ask for kitty sedatives from their veterinarian. But they can be actually counterproductive for cats, so it might not be a good idea to give a kitty any type of Quaalude for sedation during road trips. Homeopathic Aconitum provides far better results calming cats during travel.

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