

Getting Your Cat Adjusted to a Carrier

A cat carrier is important for safely transporting your cat. However, if a cat isn't used to their carrier, they typically won't like going into it, and may try to resist being placed into one by running, hiding, swatting, or biting. Not only can make it extremely difficult to put them in during urgent or important situations, but it significantly raises their stress levels while trying to get them in and when they are finally in it. Stress can have negative consequences on their welfare, and for older animals it can cause health setbacks. Therefore, getting your cat(s) used to a carrier BEFORE an urgent situation arises is highly recommended. Luckily, this stress can be avoided if you work on getting them adjusted to their carriers!

**If your cat is already fearful of the carrier, this process may take several weeks. As you go through each step, do not progress to the next step until your cat is ready (calm, accepting the step you are working on). Please be patient and let them adjust on their time for successful results.*

Adjusting to the Presence of the Carrier

1. Cats can quickly begin to associate their carrier with scary trips/ the veterinarian/ unpleasant travel if they are only exposed to their carrier during times they are transported. Often, they will run/hide at the sight of the carrier. If this is your cat, work on getting them comfortable sharing space with the carrier before working on getting them used to being inside of it. Place the carrier in a familiar space where your cat spends a lot of time with you. Make sure to keep it open- you may want to remove the door if possible. Once your cat doesn't seem to mind its presence, progress to the next step.
2. Start feeding your cat right in front of the entrance to the carrier. This may not happen right away if your cat fears the carrier so if more than 1 meal is skipped move the food bowl a bit further back from it until they start to eat. Gradually decrease the distance between the food and the carrier over many meals, until your cat is consistently eating right in front of the carrier.

Entering the Carrier

Once your cat is comfortable with the presence of the carrier, begin feeding your cat in the carrier. **IMPORTANT:** Only give your cat their food and special treats during training when they are inside the carrier. This may take some time and patience but is a crucial step. When they begin to associate that the only time they get the food they love is in the carrier, the carrier slowly becomes positively associated with mealtime and good things and eventually they will be comfortable eating all meals in the carrier.

1. Start by sitting near your cat as they eat in front of their carrier. Next, take a small treat or bit of food and put it on the entrance of the carrier. Once they approach that entrance and eat it willingly, move to the next step.
2. Put the food just inside the door. Once they are comfortable enough to put their head in the carrier to eat from the bowl a few times in a row, move to the next step.



3. Put the food further back in the carrier so that the front paws must be inside of the carrier to access the food. Once kitty is consistently comfortable eating like this, proceed.
4. Put the food all the way in the back of the carrier so that your cat must completely enter to eat. Once your cat willingly goes in and eats in the back, proceed. Make sure they seem very comfortable eating meals like this (not just one try!) before moving forward.

Being in the Closed Carrier

This step can take the longest for your cat to get used to- this is normal! Don't get discouraged if you need to take a step back and continue reinforcing the positive with feedings prior to continuing this step.

1. Toss a few small treats or a small bit of enticing food in the back of the carrier to get your cat to go inside. Once inside, gently close the door while tossing in a few more treats. Don't latch the door, just put your hand over it to keep it closed. After a few seconds, toss more treats in and open the door slowly. Once your cat eats those last treats instead of just running out of the carrier, they are ready for the next step. Until then, continue practicing a few seconds of the door being closed and then letting them out.
2. Slowly increase the time the door is closed until you can keep it closed for about 20 seconds. Once you can leave them closed in for 20 seconds and they eat the treats you toss in at the end, proceed.
3. Now, after getting your cat into the carrier, close the door this time and step back. After a few seconds, bend down and toss some treats either through the front door holes or a tiny hole in the zipper. After tossing the treats, immediately open the door. When your cat eats those treats instead of immediately leaving the carrier, move to the next step.

Adjusting to Being Moved in the Closed Carrier

One of the scariest things for cats in their carriers is losing control of where they are going and movement. Therefore, it's best to get them used to being moved around in the carrier as well! This makes trips a bit less scary overall. Once they have mastered being placed into the carrier, pick the carrier up and walk around your home for a minute, then return the carrier to its original spot, toss treats, and open the door. Until they eat the treats and aren't running out to escape as soon as you open the door, don't introduce a new movement (briefly stepping outside, a short car ride, etc). The more positive experiences you can get them exposed to where they are not medically handled, the happier your cat will be in the long run because they will no longer associate the carrier with JUST the vet. Instead, the vet will only be one of many experiences.

If your cat is adjusted to the carrier and then spooked after an experience or vet visit, continue to follow the protocol of feeding only in the carrier, so they continue to be used to the carrier.