

Traveling with Your Cat

The comforts of home and a little understanding make a car or plane journey smoother. Here are a few important factors to consider when traveling with your cat.

Many cats travel well in cars. For the cat's safety, a carrier is highly recommended. "A cat should never roam freely throughout a car. It is extremely dangerous for you and the cat," Drew Weigner, DVM, of Atlanta, GA. Carriers should be secure within the car. Some carriers are adapted for car travel; if not, the seat belt should hold it in place. Place a blanket with the familiar scent of home inside to soothe your cat. When arriving at a rest stop, take care not to let your cat out as you exit the vehicle. An ID tag or collar is a good precaution in case it does escape.

Supplies for a long journey should include food, water, bowls, litter, litter box, carrier, identification (such as photos), medical records and any medications the cat takes. According to Elaine Wexler-Mitchell, DVM, president of the board of the Academy of Feline Medicine, most cats do not eat, drink or eliminate while traveling. It is important to supply food and water as soon as you arrive at your destination or a designated stop for the night. Take into consideration the time of year that you are traveling. Never leave the cat in a parked car unattended, especially in the heat. Dehydration can be fatal.

If the cat becomes agitated and does not calm after a few minutes of travel, sedatives may help minimize stress and ensure that the cat will not break out of its carrier, Dr. Wexler-Mitchell says. A disadvantage to sedatives is that they tend to decrease a cat's body temperature, Dr. Weigner says. Use caution during cold weather travel.

If your cat is unruly and will not agree to anything, Dr. Weigner suggests opting for plane travel rather than the car. "It is just as stressful but a shorter traveling experience," he says. Whatever option you may choose, be gentle. Your cat is depending on you.

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