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Fear Free Veterinary Visits

Does your dog or cat get anxious as the idea of going to the vet? Do you get anxious about bringing them to the vet, knowing that the visit will bring fear for your pet? While some dogs and even some cats love going on an adventure and getting to socialize with new people, many pets are fearful or anxious at the prospect of going to the veterinarian. This can sometimes cause pet owners to put off important vet visits or even avoid going altogether. Unfortunately, when this occurs the pet suffers by not receiving the important health care they need.

Veterinarians are very aware of this trend and are seeking ways to make it less stressful for pets and owners. One of the best movements out there is the Fear Free Veterinary Movement. The goal of this effort is to find ways to make the experience less stressful for both the pets and their owners, so coming in isn't such a hassle.

Start Early

It is best to start training at an early age. This involves bringing the puppy and kitten in for "happy" visits, where they just come in to greet staff, get loves, pets, and treats. Interspersing these visits in between the "regular" visits can help to alleviate some of their anxiety and even make them look forward to coming to the vet. We find that the dogs that come for doggie daycare and our Saturday Socialization event at ZimmVet, "Dogs and donuts," typically can't wait to get in the door as they know they will get to see their friends.

Take Measures at Home

There are also things that can be done at home prior to the visit that can help to reduce anxiety. For cats, leaving the carrier out at all times so that they can use it whenever they want, removes the fearful association with the carrier. For dogs practicing with car rides and having the pet secured in a kennel or harness during the rides is important. Placing a soft blanket, feeding treats, putting special toys, and catnip in the carrier on a regular basis allows them to associate the carrier with positive experiences. Using calming pheromone sprays such as Feliway for cats and Adaptil for dogs can help.

Thundershirts are another great product that can help to alleviate some anxiety. They come in a range of sizes, so can be used for very small dogs or cats all the way up to some of the large breed dogs. The goal of the Thundershirt is to alleviate anxiety by providing "gentle, constant pressure, similar to swaddling an infant."

Treats go a long way

Treats are also a great way to help make a veterinary visit more enjoyable for your pet. Holding off on feeding the prior to the visit and bringing along their favorite treats, make the visit extra enjoyable.

For some pets, their anxiety is so strong that it is best to provide antianxiety medications prior to their visit. This strategy requires a thorough discussion with your veterinarian and may require having your pet come in for a brief exam first to determine which medication will provide the safest and best anxiety relief for your pet. Once you and your veterinarian have determined the best option you can return with your pet at a later date for a more thorough exam and any additional diagnostic tests that are needed to fully assess the health of your pet.

Please contact your veterinarian to discuss options for helping decrease the anxiety of veterinary visits for your pet.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.