

How to Get a Cat Into a Pet Carrier

A pet carrier is not your cat's best friend. In fact, she may try anything and everything to avoid getting in the carrier, including using her claws and teeth. Although getting your cat into her carrier can be challenging, there are ways to make it a less stressful experience for the both of you.

If your cat has a history of not liking the cat carrier, a large carrier with a wide opening will be less threatening, and make all of the techniques described below easier to apply. We can lend you one if needed – just ask!

Part 1

Acclimating Your Cat to Her Pet Carrier

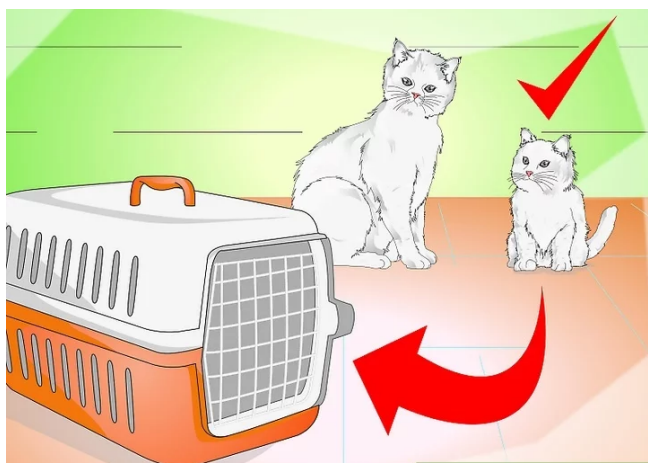
1

Start the acclimation process early.

The earlier in your cat's life that she becomes comfortable with her carrier, the better.

Kittens tend to be more adaptable than adult or senior cats, so it is best to start the acclimation process when your cat is a kitten. If you have an older cat, the acclimation process will probably take a bit longer.

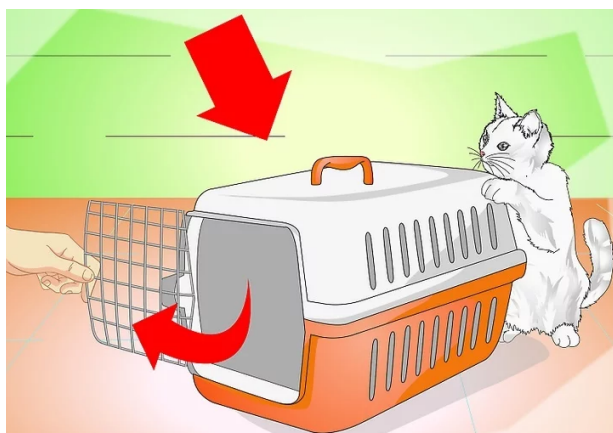
- It may take anywhere from several weeks to several months before your cat is comfortable with her carrier.
- If you want to put your cat in a carrier to take her on a trip with you, start the acclimation process at least several weeks before your departure.



2

Leave the carrier out at all times.

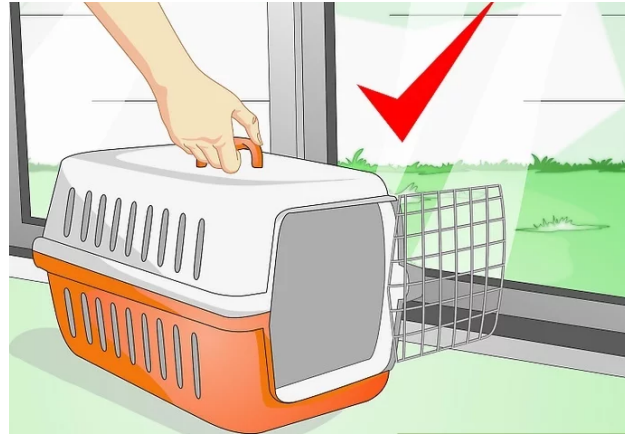
To cats, the presence of a pet carrier usually means something bad is about to happen, like a trip to the vet's office. If you take the carrier out only when you need to take your cat somewhere, then she will likely learn to fear it. Therefore, it is recommended to leave the carrier out on the floor all the time.



- Leave the carrier door open. This will allow your cat to enter and exit the carrier as she pleases, without fearing that you are going to close the door on her. However, it is important that you prop the door open securely, so that it doesn't clang and swing open and shut. Try positioning the carrier so the door opens against a wall and putting a book in front of the door or wedging a small rolled up towel between the floor and the door.

3

Place the pet carrier in a favourite location. Even with unlimited access, your cat may not want to enter the carrier if it is in a location where she does not frequent. Put the carrier in one of her favourite spots, such as by a window that gets lots of sunlight.

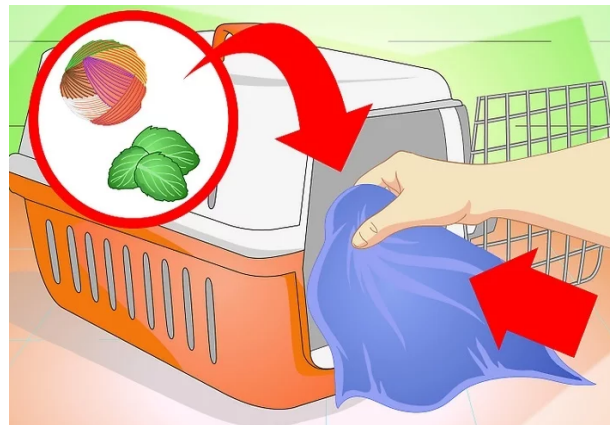


4

Make the inside of the carrier enticing for your cat.

The carrier should feel like a place of comfort and safety to your cat, even if she's not exactly thrilled about being inside of it. One way to entice your cat into the carrier is to make it smell familiar to her. For example, place her favourite towel or blanket in the carrier.

- Spray calming cat pheromones such as Feliway (available for purchase at our clinic) in the carrier.
- Place some kibbles, treats, or catnip in your cat's carrier. Replenish the supply when needed.
- If she has some favourite toys, place those in the carrier as well, or toss balls in as part of playtime.

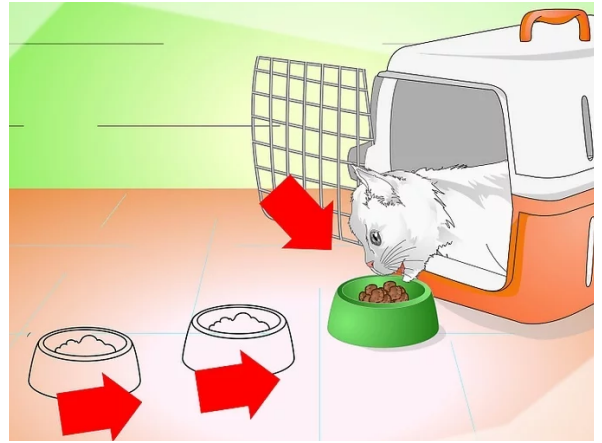


5

Feed your cat in her carrier.

To get your cat used to spending time in her carrier, try feeding her when she is inside of it. Initially, however, she may not want to eat her meals inside of her carrier. Rather, she may feel more comfortable eating her meals *near* the carrier.

- Place her food bowl a few feet away from the carrier. Gradually move the bowl closer to the carrier each time that you feed her.
- If she doesn't want to eat the food when you move the bowl closer, move it back and start the process again.
- Ideally, your cat will work up to eating from her bowl when it is inside the carrier, at the very back. If she does this, try feeding her in her carrier every day.
- Your cat may not eat in the carrier if she senses you watching her—she may think you will close the door behind her. Stand far enough away from her so that she can eat without that suspicion, then over time, work on getting closer, so that you will eventually be able to shut the door when she goes in to eat her meal.



6

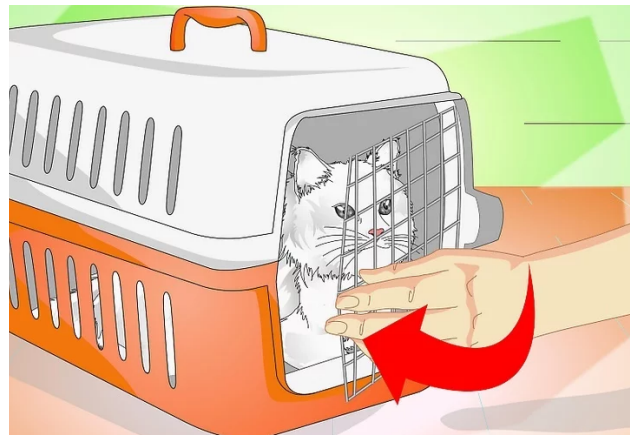
Practice closing the carrier door.

Being inside the carrier could feel like a trap to your cat, so she will need to become comfortable with you being near the carrier when she is inside, and eventually, with you closing its door. When she is comfortable entering and staying in the carrier, briefly close the door. Immediately give her a treat, then open the door and let her out:

- Do not practice closing the door when your cat is eating.
- Start by closing the door for only a few seconds.

When you repeat this process, slowly increase the amount of time you leave the carrier door closed before offering her a treat and letting her back out.

- Give her a treat only if she does not get upset or try to get out when you shut the door. If she does either of those, decrease the amount of time you keep the door closed.
- ***For a very fearful or carrier-averse cat, or if you are carrier training for a vet visit coming up very soon, you may want to just practice being able to get near and sit beside the carrier with your cat inside, and being able to move around there without your cat becoming spooked and bolting out. Unless you are preparing with a lot of lead-time, closing the door on a very nervous cat may set your carrier progress back. Work up to handing your cat treats inside the carrier, and reaching in to pet her in the carrier, so that on the day you have to close the door, movement near the door does not startle her.



- On vet day, make sure that the door is only lightly propped open, so that you will be able to shut it without moving things around or jostling the carrier, and then follow your cat's normal routine, whether that is placing their meal in the back of the carrier, tossing some treats to the back, or throwing their favourite toy in the carrier. Then close the door when they have gone fully inside.
- Double check that the door is securely closed, and all of the carrier fasteners are secure, and then cover the carrier with a towel sprayed with 6-8 sprays of calming cat pheromones, like Feliway.

Part 2

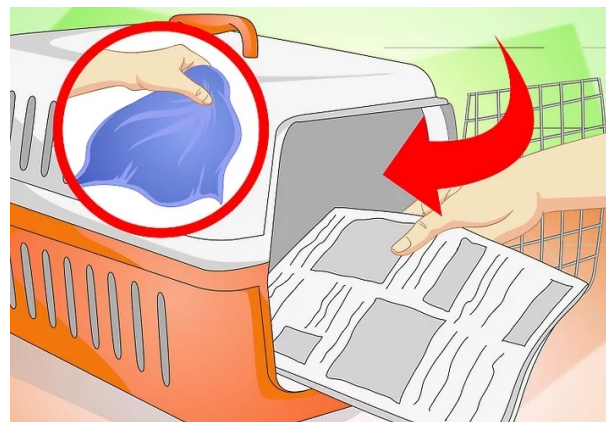
Putting Your Cat in Her Pet Carrier if She Won't Go in on Her Own

As mentioned earlier, this technique will be far easier and less stressful to your cat if you do it with a large carrier that has a wide opening. A plastic carrier is also far easier to use for this, as cats' nails can get stuck on the sides of a fabric carrier, preventing you from lowering them in.

1

Place an extra towel or newspaper inside the carrier.

The stress of being in a carrier may cause your cat to urinate. An extra towel or newspaper will help soak up the urine so that your cat does not have to feel the 'soil spot' in the carrier. If you use an extra towel, you can spray it with cat pheromones if it is not one she usually sleeps on.

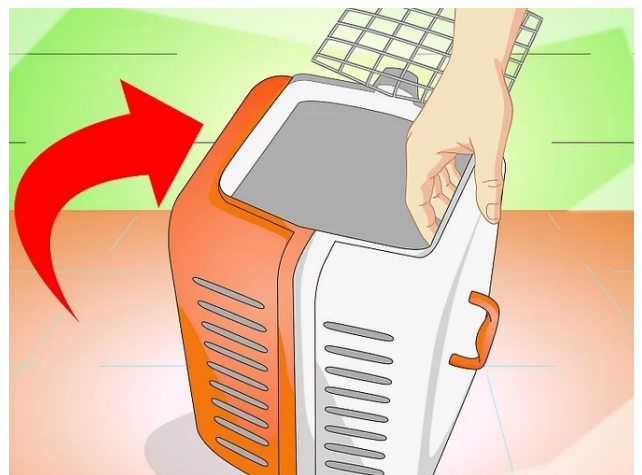


2

Position the carrier.

Front- or top-loading hard-sided carriers are ideal for learning how to put your cat into a carrier. If you have a front-loading carrier, place it on its end with the opening facing toward the ceiling. This way, you will be able to place your cat in the carrier safely and with a relative amount of ease.

- It may be helpful to place the carrier against the wall



to keep it from falling back as you are trying to place your cat inside of it.

- Be careful to position the carrier quietly, or do it a few days in advance – the sound of the door clanking around can send some cats straight to their favourite hiding place. You may also want to position the carrier **behind** where you plan to pick up your cat, so that she doesn't see it until you lower her inside.

3

Pick up your cat.

How you pick up your cat is very important to safely placing her in the carrier. Wrap one arm around her hind end and position your other arm under her chest. For the arm supporting your cat's back end, use your hand to hold her back legs.

- Her hind end should be against your chest, with the rest of her body facing away from you.
- If your cat is prone to struggling and scratching, use a thick towel to pick her up.

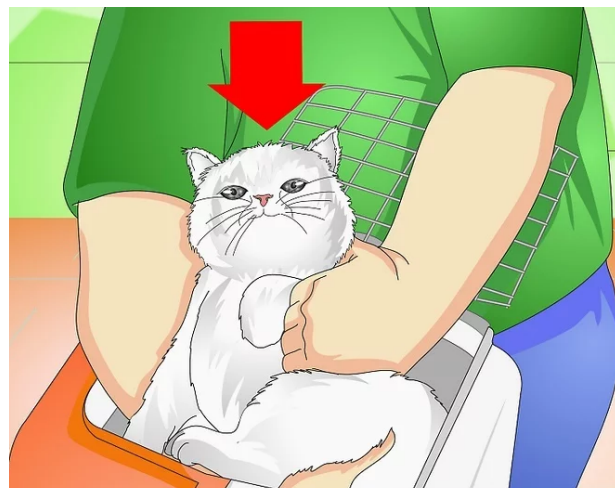


4

Lower your cat into her carrier.

Slowly put your cat's hind end in the carrier first. By lowering her in this way, she will not feel like she is being forced into the carrier with no way out.

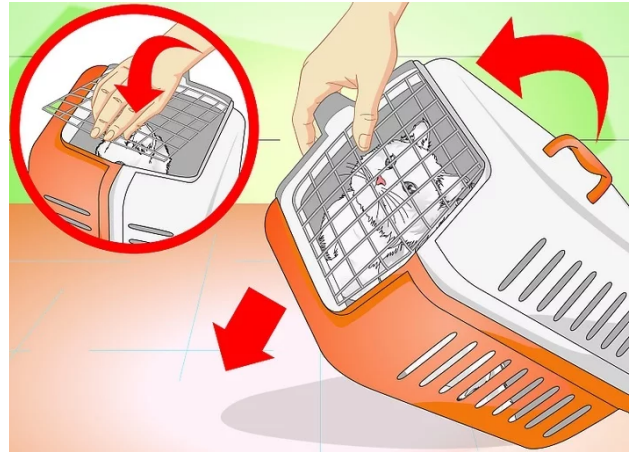
- If your cat starts to struggle, put her down and give her time to calm down before trying again.
- Some cats like to “stand” on the edges of the carrier to prevent you from lowering them in feet-first. Having a second person available to gently guide their legs through the carrier opening can help.



5

Close the carrier door and reposition the carrier.

When your cat is safely in the carrier, secure the latch and position the carrier with its bottom on the floor. Give your cat treats if she behaved well when being placed in the carrier (e.g., no biting, scratching, or excessive struggle).



6

Cover the carrier with a towel or pillowcase.

Placing a towel or pillowcase over the carrier makes it feel more snug and safe to your cat, reinforcing the idea that the carrier is a place of comfort and safety. When traveling in the car, covering the carrier can help block out the fact that the car is moving but your cat is not.

- If you have calming cat pheromone spray like Feliway (available from our clinic), spray the towel with 6-8 sprays a few minutes before placing it over the carrier.
- Your cat's sense of balance can be disrupted during car travel. Cats are also very sensitive to acceleration and deceleration, so make an extra effort to drive smoothly when your cat is along for the ride.
- Do not cover the carrier on a hot day.

