

Socializing Your Pet to the Veterinary Clinic
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A trip to the veterinarian can be frightening for some pets. Both dogs and cats may be uncomfortable being in close quarters with other animals, or upset by the unfamiliar smells and sounds in a veterinary clinic. Unpleasant past experiences, even a single one, can convince a pet that the veterinary clinic is not a fun place to visit.

Dogs and cats who are fearful, struggle when restrained, or are threatening and aggressive are not enjoyable for the veterinary staff to handle either. Owners may become embarrassed or frightened as well if their pets lose control during the visit. The best way to avoid these problems is to take a proactive approach to prevent your pet from becoming stressed out at the veterinarian's.

If you have a puppy or kitten, the first step in a proactive approach is to take your new pet to the veterinary clinic for several socialization visits. During a socialization visit, several staff members pet the animal, offer him a tidbit, perhaps place him on the exam table for a minute or two while petting him and offering more tidbits or a toy to play with, gently handle the pet, and then say goodbye.

Most veterinary clinics will encourage such visits, as they help the pet become accustomed to visiting, and to associate "good things" with the clinic. Because nothing bad has happened to him, he is more likely to feel good about visiting the next time. The same thing can be done with adult animals, but this may take longer if an existing fear of the clinic must be overcome.

Another part of the proactive approach is for owners to inform the veterinarian and the staff of any procedures or situations they know their pets have trouble tolerating. For example, if you know your dog does not like his feet touched, or your cat will bite if petted too long, it is crucial that the staff be aware of these tendencies before attempting to handle your pet.

Don't be ashamed to admit your pet has these tendencies – having this information ahead of time can help the staff make things easier on your pet. You may even want to talk to your veterinarian about the possibility of a mild sedative for your pet for things like nail trims, or the option of putting a muzzle on him before you leave home.

It is important for owners to socialize and train their pets so they can be easily handled at the clinic. Otherwise, pets may not be able to receive the veterinary care they need. A veterinarian is not going to be able to adequately examine an animal who is trying to bite when anyone gets too close. Some veterinarians charge an extra fee for difficult to handle animals, because they take more time and put their staff at risk of injury.

Veterinarians too, have the responsibility to do what they can to minimize your pet's stress, to handle him as gently as possible and to never retaliate in anger against a difficult to handle pet.