



***Information on  
travel and vet  
visit anxiety  
in cats***

**Information  
and solutions**



**DÔMES  
PHARMA**



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# Travel and vet visit anxiety in cats

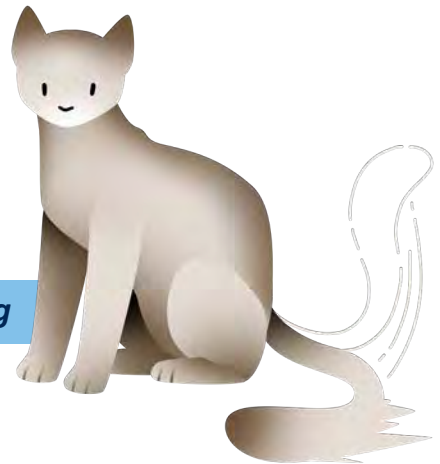
Cats feel anxious when they think there is a possible threat to their safety and security. The feeling escalates to fear when they perceive the threat becoming real. Any situation can spark anxiety in your cat, but there's one that will almost universally distress even the calmest of kitties: vet visits, and the car journey. Cats feel safe and in control on their own turf, with their own people. The unpredictability of travel and new places can be upsetting

It is vital to recognise and manage your cat's anxiety, especially if it prevents you from going to the vet. Routine health checks are the key to a long, healthy life. Cats are masters at hiding signs of illness and pain, and it's not unusual to see a cat developing a health condition without you even noticing. Cats also age much faster than humans: as an example, an 8-year-old cat would be 48 in human years!

If visits to the vet are difficult, don't worry. There's a lot you can do! If you need more help, talk to your vet.

***Cats are solitary hunters while also being prey. Because there's no pack to support them when things go wrong, they have a highly developed survival instinct that helps them react quickly to a perceived danger.***

***Sign of anxiety: tail flicking***



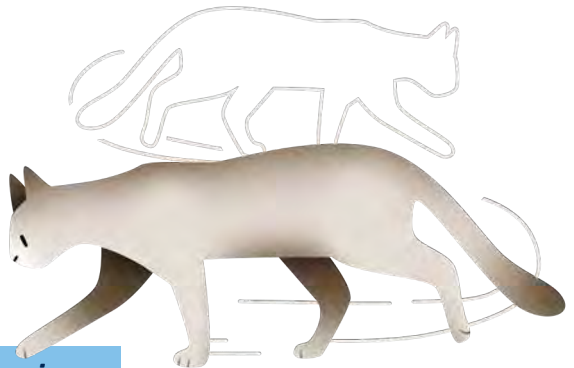
# ***Behavioural responses***

It is important to recognise the signs of fear and anxiety in your cat.

Often, when faced with a potential threat, cats will withdraw and hide in an attempt to escape the perceived danger, rather than fighting. Other behavioural signs include restlessness, freezing, vocalisation or unintentional urination. In cases of extreme fear and anxiety, defensive aggression is possible.

An anxious cat can make visiting the vet stressful for owners too. Panicking because you can't find your cat when it's time to leave, struggling to place your cat in the carrier and hearing your cat's anxious cries on the way does make going to the vets challenging. By recognising the signs of fear and anxiety in your cat, you will be able to help your cat and prevent the situation from getting worse.

The good news is that the signs of acute anxiety in cats are relatively easy to recognise, once you know what to look out for.



***Sign of anxiety: restless pacing***

## SIGNS OF ACUTE ANXIETY

- Restless pacing
- Escaping and/or hiding
- Freezing
- Shaking
- Rapid breathing
- Vocalisation (meowing, yowling, hissing or growling)
- Crouched body position
- Tail flicking or held close to the body
- Dilated pupils
- Flattened ears
- Pulled back whiskers
- Continuous licking/grooming
- Unintentional urination or defecation
- Defensive aggression



*Sign of anxiety: defensive aggression*



*Sign of anxiety: crouching*



*Sign of anxiety:  
continuous licking / grooming*



*Sign of anxiety: escaping and/ or hiding*

# Triggers and causes

## **UNFAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS.**

In the wild, the survival of felines depends on staying inside their own territory and defending it. This is why taking a cat away from home makes them feel unsafe, especially if the experience involves unfamiliar people and animals.

## **SUPERIOR SENSES.**

Cats have a far better sense of sight, sound, and smell than humans. Considering this, it is easier to understand why your cat might become upset about something that you don't consider disturbing.

## **MOTION SICKNESS.**

Excessive salivation and vomiting can be signs of motion sickness but they can be signs of anxiety too! It can be difficult to distinguish the two - speak to your vet for more information.

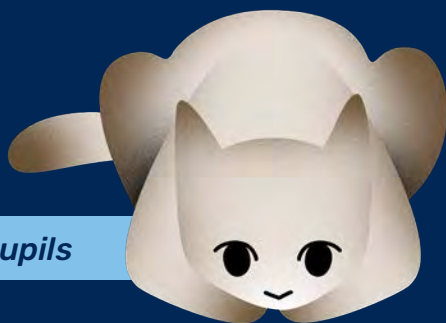
## **NEGATIVE ASSOCIATIONS.**

If the only time a cat goes into the carrier or travels in a car is to go to the vet, they will easily develop negative associations with both things.

## **OWNER BEHAVIOUR.**

Your behaviour greatly influences your cat's sense of security. Try to stay calm so that you don't increase your cat's anxiety.

*Sign of anxiety: dilated pupils*



# 5 steps for making travel and vet visits easier

**Call your vet in advance and ask when the quietest times at the vet practice are. Schedule your cat's visit during these quiet times, if possible.**

## **1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT CARRIER.**

Choose a carrier that can be easily disassembled. That way, during an examination the carrier top can be removed allowing your cat to stay in the bottom part and feel safe. Sturdy plastic carriers with removable tops are the preferred option. 'Backpack' carriers, fabric carriers and harnesses should be avoided.

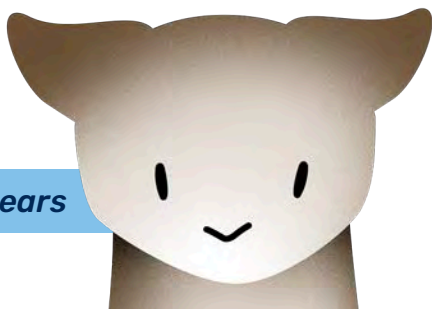
Ensure the carrier you choose is big enough to allow your cat to stand up and turn in a full circle, large enough to allow you to get your cat in or out without a struggle, and that it is secure, comfortable and covered to allow your cat privacy.

## **2. ENCOURAGE YOUR CAT TO TOLERATE – OR EVEN ENJOY – THE CARRIER.**

If you can, leave the carrier out in your living space. Let your cat explore it. Be patient – never push the cat inside. Instead, let your cat choose to enter.

You can make the space attractive to your cat by placing toys, treats, or catnip inside the carrier. Placing a favourite blanket inside the carrier is also a good idea – the familiar scent may help calm your cat.

***Sign of anxiety: flattened ears***





### 3. MOVE GENTLY WITH THE CARRIER.

Hold the carrier level by supporting from underneath, and avoid swinging the carrier while you walk. Raise and lower the carrier slowly – no bumping!

### 4. MAKE THE RIDE PLEASANT

Take your cat for short rides. This gives your cat the opportunity to acclimatise to the carrier and the car. Cats have sensitive hearing. Turn off the loud music and play soft classical instead. Or even better, play music that has been made for cats! Scientists have developed music that features pitches and rhythms that cats enjoy.

You may be tempted to place the carrier on the passenger seat next to you, but that isn't the best option. Place the carrier on the floor in the back – there's less motion, which will make your cat feel more secure. Consider covering the carrier with a towel or blanket.

On the drive over, if your cat begins to yowl, avoid shushing. Shushing sounds too much like hissing and can agitate your cat further.

***If you are taking a taxi, or public transport.*** Most taxis will allow you to bring your pet. When you book your taxi, be sure to tell them that you'll have your pet with you, and always use a carrier on the ride.



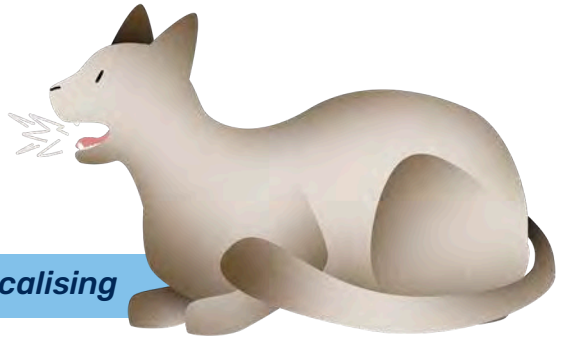
***Sign of anxiety: rapid breathing/ panting***

## 5. WHEN YOU ARRIVE.

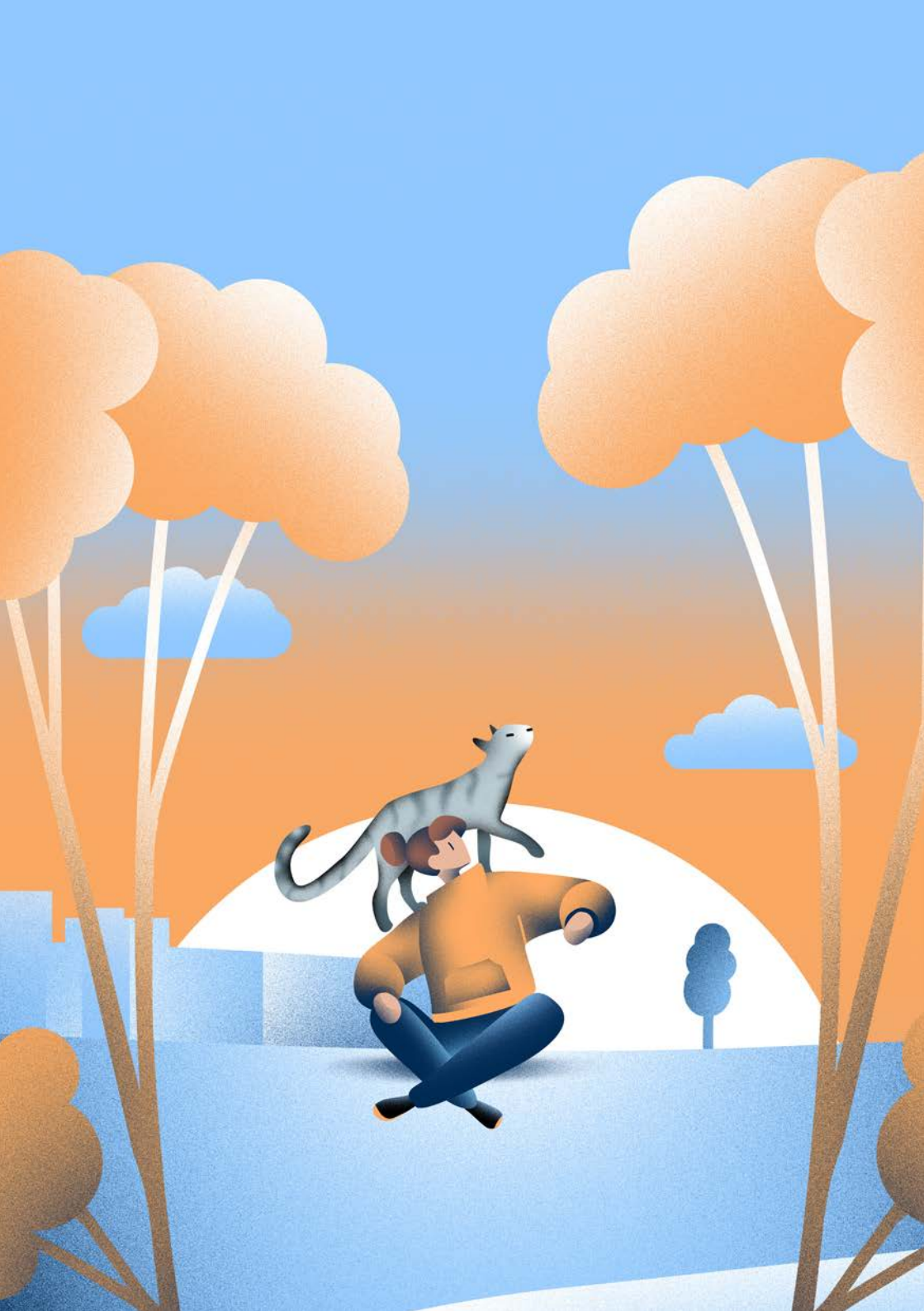
If your vet doesn't have separate waiting rooms – or if your cat is easily upset by other cats – consider these options.

If you and your cat can stay comfortable in a car outside, then stay in the car. Call the front desk to check in and wait until an exam room is ready before going in.

If waiting in the car isn't an option, head in to the vet practice. Seat yourself as far away as possible from the other owners and their pets. Place the carrier on a chair – cats feel safer when they have a vantage point. Turn the carrier toward the wall to prevent eye contact between your cat and other animals.



***Sign of anxiety: vocalising***





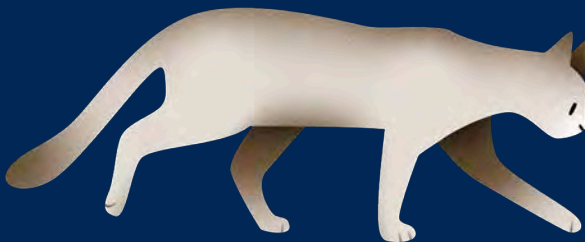
# Make your trips to the vet easier!



Trips to the vet can upset even the calmest of cats. The unfamiliarity of the carrier, a rough ride, a noisy or crowded clinic – these and more can trigger signs of anxiety in your cat.

In this guide, learn what cat anxiety looks like, what its possible causes are, and what you can do to make your cat feel safe every step of the way: inside the carrier, during travel and in the clinic.

Ask for help from your vet if travel and clinic visits are challenging. They can provide the optimal solution for your cat.



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