

Happy vet visits - Why we want to reduce fear, anxiety and stress in your pet.

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With most pets considered an important member of the family, it is natural for owners to be invested in their pet's emotional and mental wellbeing. So, when it comes to vet visits most owners recognize that this is a stressful experience for their pet and are keen to reduce the anxiety and fear associated with the visit.



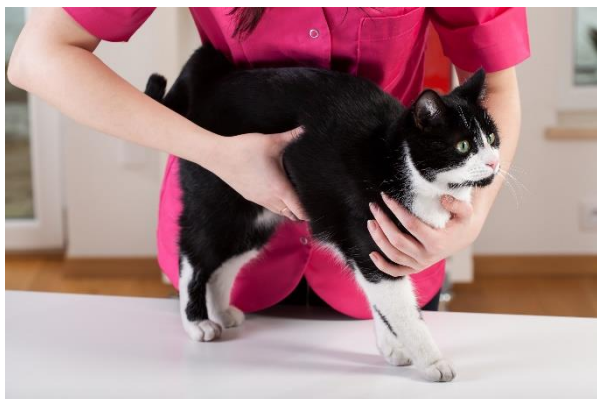
What are the signs of stress in animals?

Even the most relaxed pets will show subtle signs of anxiety when faced with a vet visit such as hiding, heavy panting or standing at the consult room door. For some owners this can be an incredibly stressful process if their cat or dog is particularly anxious. Anxious cats will vocalise, urinate or defecate, freeze, try to escape, hide or lash out with aggression. Anxious dogs will pant heavily, bark, stand stiffly, flee or growl and respond aggressively. In fact, most pet aggression shown to vets is a result of that pet being very scared and responding with a biological "fight" mode to the perceived threat.

How do we reduce stress?

At Thornleigh Vet Hospital we consider your pet's emotional wellbeing a priority and aim for every animal to have a fear-free visit. To do this we have implemented several protocols to reduce fear, anxiety and stress and continue to build and review these protocols regularly. Implementations include:

- All staff are completing a **fear-free handling accreditation**. This includes information on gentle handling techniques, identifying fear, anxiety and stress in pets and learning techniques to reduce these symptoms. For more information see <https://fearfreepets.com/>.
- **Clinic-wide use of pheromone therapy**. Our waiting rooms have a cat chillax zone and a dog de-stress zone where pheromones can be applied to a towel (cats) or bandanna (dogs) to calm and reassure your pet. Diffusers are also used throughout the hospital. Since implementing these changes we've seen a significant reduction in anxiety once the pets reach the consult rooms making them easier to examine and much happier to receive treats and pats.



What are "cat-friendly clinics"?

We're a Silver Cat Friendly Accredited clinic with the International Society of Feline Medicine. This accreditation means that we have an understanding of the unique needs of cats and we aim to provide a vet visit that is cat friendly. This involves gentle handling, separate dog and cat areas as well as specific equipment to manage cats. For more information see: <https://catfriendlyclinic.org/cat-owners/what-is-a-cat-friendly-clinic/>.

Is it possible to make a trip to the vet a positive experience?

- Yes, and one of the ways is with the use of treats which we use liberally for bribery! We stock a large range of treats for cats and dogs to help make the vet visit a positive experience and to distract pets whilst we perform procedures they may not be comfortable with such as needles or nail clips. Bring your pet hungry to make them even more interested!
- **A needle-free puppy or kitten visit.** We offer a free puppy or kitten check within 48 hours of purchase. One of the main reasons for this is to provide them with a stress-free visit that involves lots of treats, a gentle exam and a chance to meet the team without needles or any other potentially stressful events that would invoke a negative response at future vet visits.
- **Free happy visits** where your pet can drop in for treats and a pat but nothing more to reinforce a positive visit. You can even bring their favourite toy to re-inforce the positive experience.
- **Separate dog and cat areas.** As well as a separate dog and cat waiting room, we also have separate consult rooms and separate hospital wards to ensure smells, sights and sounds are minimized and particularly to reduce the impact of dogs for our cat visitors.

What if I can't even get my pet out of their carrier due to fear?

We're flexible with consultations, so for example, if your pet doesn't like the exam table, we'll examine them on the floor. If your dog prefers to wait outside or in the car with you, that's fine too. If your cat hates coming out of the carrier, we'll gently take the top off instead of forcing them out. These little changes can have a big impact on your pet's stress levels.

Hospital Visit Strategies for those particularly anxious pets.

If your pet reacts very aggressively or anxiously for vet visits, we will formulate a plan in advance of their visit to ensure we can reduce their anxiety and keep everyone safe. This might involve pheromone therapy at home before the visit and the use of anti-anxiety medications. It may also involve booking a time that is quieter within the clinic or a longer appointment. Please speak to us if you feel your pet could benefit from a hospital visit strategy.



Comprehensive knowledge of behavioural medicine.

Our vets have worked hard to stay up-to-date with the rapidly changing world of veterinary behavioural medicine including natural therapies. All our vets are well-skilled in identifying behavioural problems, using anxiety-related medications and recommending referral where specialist intervention is required.

Taking this approach has allowed us to develop stronger bonds with our patients which in turn has led to more comprehensive consultations and a significant reduction in stress-related symptoms before, during and after vet visits. We are so pleased to be able to offer this fear-free approach to all our patients and welcome any enquiries related to anxious, fearful or stressed pets.