



Travelling can be a stressful experience for human beings and it is probably equally so for cats, although for different reasons. While your cat is not going to be worried about arriving at its destination on time it will have been plucked from its familiar territory, put in to a container and subjected to an array of strange sights, sounds and smells. A frightened animal is likely to panic and so care has to be taken to make sure it arrives safe and well at its destination.

What is needed to prepare for a journey?

If you take sensible precautions the chances of your cat becoming lost en route will be minimal but be prepared for any eventuality. Make sure that your cat is fitted with a collar and tag with your address and telephone number. A microchip implant is even more useful because it is a permanent form of identification. If it is going to be a long journey you may have your cat checked by your vet to ensure it is healthy before it travels. If your cat is unable to travel you will need to make alternative arrangements for it; you could arrange for your cat to stay with a friend or book it in at a cattery or with a pet sitter.

Take plenty of fresh water, particularly when travelling in hot weather. If your journey is broken for any reason, make sure there is no risk of your cat overheating if left inside the car. Try not to leave your cat alone in the car, but if this is unavoidable leave the car out of direct sunlight and with all windows open. Never leave your cat unattended in the car for any length of time - remember a car on a hot day quickly becomes an oven. Some cats are anxious when first travelling, but eventually the noise and motion of the car will calm them and most usually fall asleep. If your cat suffers from motion sickness do not feed it within about an hour of the start of the journey.

What is the best sort of carrying box?

Cheap cardboard carrying boxes are widely available from veterinary surgeons, animal charities and pet shops but they are not suitable for a long journey because they are not secure enough. Cats can easily claw their way out of the box and an animal running loose inside a car is a danger to itself and the other occupants. The box will also become dangerously weak if it gets wet from urine or drink spilt inside. Wire or wicker baskets expose your cat to cold draughts and are not suitable for long journeys. The best type of carrying case is made of plastic or fibreglass. It is strong, well ventilated, lasts for years and is easy to clean. The box should be large enough to permit your cat to stand up, turn around and see out easily.

What is needed for the journey?

Line the bottom of the container with absorbent material, eg newspaper in case your cat needs to urinate or water is spilt. Cover this with a familiar smelling blanket (or piece of your old clothing) so that your cat can rest in comfort. There should be a dish of water and dried food may sometimes be useful on a lengthy journey. If your cat has a favourite toy, put that in its carrying box. If your cat has not been in the carrying box before introduce it well before the journey. Leave the box around the house for a few days with the door open and a blanket inside and your cat will probably go in to explore. Spraying the inside with a pheromone (natural cat scent) before travelling may make your cat more relaxed on your journey. Once your cat is used to the container, feed it inside there and shut it in for short periods before travelling.

Where should my cat travel in the car?

Car travel

The carrying box should be put inside the car on the floor or strapped securely on to a seat, not in the boot. Do not put it in the rear of a hatchback or estate car because your cat may overheat if ventilation is poor. Never let your cat out of the container during the journey in case it tries to escape. Your cat may be anxious at first but eventually most cats fall asleep. It is possible that your cat may suffer motion sickness and so it is not a good idea to feed it within about an hour of the start of the journey. If your journey is broken for any reason, make sure there is no risk of your cat overheating if left inside the car - on a hot day leave the car out of direct sunlight and with a window open.

How do I arrange plane travel?

Air travel



Contact the airline well in advance to find out their rules for transporting cats. Sometimes cats can be taken into the cabin as hand luggage provided they are in a suitable container that will fit under a seat. However, more often they have to travel in the aircraft hold because of the risk of escape and of people with allergies to cats having serious health problems in the confined space of an aircraft cabin. Make sure you arrive early for the flight as cargo is usually loaded first. The travelling box should be marked as containing a live animal with your contact details clearly displayed on the side. Tape another piece of paper with these details to the inside of the box for extra safety. If your cat is going abroad contact your vet well before travelling to find out what vaccinations and health certificates it will need. It may take several months to complete necessary vaccinations, tests and paperwork before your cat is allowed to travel.

Should cats be sedated for the journey?

If your cat is a nervous traveller it may be a good idea to ask your vet for a sedative before going on a long car journey. Your vet will want to examine your cat first and may prescribe a drug which you can administer yourself (although they may have quite unpredictable effects). If you are given a sedative it should be administered about half an hour before the journey and will last for up to eight hours.

Do not sedate your cat before a flight because if it is drowsy it will not be able to adjust its posture for sudden movements and can be thrown around the box on a bumpy flight. Also there is some evidence that sedatives can be dangerous for cats travelling in the cargo hold. Sedatives appear to work differently in cats at higher altitudes and in most aircraft holds the air pressure is the equivalent of travelling at about 8000 ft (2400 m).

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your cat please contact All Creatures Veterinary Surgery on 0207 228 0648 and we will be happy to advise you.