

5 TOP TIPS ON HOW TO IMPROVE THE WELFARE OF CATS DURING RELOCATION



Domestic cats can experience some additional challenges during relocation.

Cats are the ultimate Sensory Being and experience sights, sounds, touch and in particular, smell much more intensely than humans or even dogs. The information received through their senses inform them of the safety of their surroundings and environment, so we can imagine that relocation can be an especially stressful experience for them.

Most of us are much more familiar with reading canine rather than feline body language. Dogs, as a very social and anciently domesticated species, have much more easy-to-read facial expressions and body language, whereas cats, who have only been domesticated for a comparatively short period of time and still have many traits of a solitary hunting species, show more subtle facial expressions and body language, which we can find much more difficult to interpret. This means that guessing how a cat is feeling and how it may react is very challenging.



As the owner and founder of the German Veterinary Clinic in Abu Dhabi, I am extremely proud to have been awarded the first Gold Standard Cat Friendly Clinic status in the Middle East by ISFM. We are massively passionate about and dedicated to improving the welfare and lives of the cats in our care, and, as an IPATA member since 2008, this includes the realm of Local and Global Relocation.

Please find below my 5 Top Tips on how to improve the welfare of cats during relocation. They are based on the 5 Freedoms of Welfare as well as the 5 Pillars of a Healthy Feline Environment from the AAFP/ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guideline.

1. Provide a Safe Place

Your pet may be spending quite a few hours in its travel crate.

Therefore, prior familiarisation with the crate and creating the perception that this is a “safe place” rather than an object of fear, is essential.

This may take a few weeks, which is why early preparation is important.

Leave your pet’s crate out in your living area from about 8 weeks prior to travel and put a snuggly blanket and favourite toy in the crate.

You can feed treats, snacks or entire meals in the crate and encourage your pet to sleep or rest in it if possible.



If your cat likes catnip, then have a daily ritual of catnip sprinkles in the crate.

If possible, place a pad or blanket/sheet with the cat's smell on it in the (hopefully familiar) crate during transport, perhaps the same one that was used during familiarisation. Cats are extremely sensitive to smell and having their own familiar scent in the crate will give them a sense of safety and security.

2. Always keep Cat Crates at a Height



During transport, make sure you protect your cat's crate from being kicked, banged into and from the prying noses of dogs, even if they are from the same family. The easiest way to achieve this is by ensuring that cat crates are always kept at a height (on a counter or bench) and are covered with a blanket or towel. Where possible, do not leave cat crates on the floor. This is a very easy habit to get into and will hugely improve a cat's sense of safety.

3. Avoid loud noises and submit cats to soothing sounds

A cat's range of hearing is almost 3 times greater than that of humans which means they hear far more frequencies than we do. From experience, cats are extremely sensitive to loud noises and become very distressed and frightened by these. Therefore, minimise loud noises as much as possible.

OR even go one step further by playing music, the frequency of which emulates a cat's purr during preparation for travel and when on the road in the car. We use the iTunes album by David Teie – "Music for Cats".



4. Use Pheromones

As mentioned previously, a cat's sense of smell is extremely important and as well as the olfactory system (system of smell), cats have a second sensory organ known as the vomeronasal organ (or Jacobson's organ), by which they can detect sensory chemicals known as pheromones. Cats have several facial pheromones as well as mammary pheromones produced by lactating mother cats and interdigital pheromones produced by the pads on the paws when they scratch.

The feline facial pheromone F3 has been created synthetically and the best-known product is marketed as Feliway Classic (CEVA). This F3 facial pheromone acts similarly to "nest scent" and reduces stress and increases security. It is also known to reduce anxiety. For the purposes of transport, the Feliway Classic spray is probably most useful, however, its effects only last for about 5 hours. We therefore recommend using it during preparation and

transit where a blanket or towel which has been sprayed with Feliway Classic can be placed over the crate. We also use the spray inside the crate prior to travel, however, we use other anxiolytics in combination (see point 5) for a longer lasting effect.



FAP (Feline Appeasing Pheromone), the pheromone produced by the mammary glands of lactating mothers is marketed as Feliway MultiCat (US-CEVA) and Feliway Friends (Europe- CEVA) and is said to alleviate stress behaviour during changes in environment. As it only comes as a diffuser, we use it in our preparation room and we advise owners to use it once they have arrived at their destination.

5. Use Anxiolytics

None of us would ever consider using sedatives during pet transport, however, we have had great success in using anxiolytics, or anxiety reducing medication. These are all supplements or nutraceuticals which reduce the wind-up or escalation of anxiety in pets. Whilst there are a few different types on the market and will be region-specific, I will give you some examples of the products we have successfully used in cats.



Zylkene

Zylkene is a nutritional supplement derived from milk protein, which acts on neurotransmitter receptors in the brain to reduce fear and anxiety in cats. It is given in convenient sprinkle capsules, which can be administered whole or opened and sprinkled into wet or dry food. We usually recommend giving Zylkene for some days prior to, during and for some days after travel whilst the cats are settling into their new environments.

Royal Canin Calm Food – Cats

This product is a complete dry food, which can be fed regularly at mealtimes. It also contains a hydrolyzed milk protein similar to Zylkene as well as L-Tryptophan, an amino acid which is a precursor for Serotonin.



Catnip

We have found this to be a great short-term tool when encouraging cats into crates or during veterinary examination. It is a preferred olfactory stimulus for cats and induces distracting investigative behaviour. Recent research shows that catnip in combination with pheromones may be significantly more beneficial than alone.

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