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On the Road Again... With Your Pets
by
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With pandemic restrictions easing, most people are anxious to get away on a vacation and want to include their pets. Bringing along your pet can be stressful though- for both of you. Advance planning, proper restraint, and helping them with their motion sickness and anxiety surrounding travel can help. (Speak to your physician about YOUR anxiety.)

First, contact your veterinarian for a copy of your pets' medical and vaccination records *at least a week in advance to allow the veterinary team to get the documents and any needed refills prepared.* You can't predict emergencies, even for short trips, so it's a good idea to have a copy of the medical records. Health certificates, if required, must be done no sooner than 10 days in advance of travel, so plan ahead scheduling this with your veterinarian.

Pack a travel kit for your pet. Include medications, leash, fresh food and water, bowls, waste disposal bags or litter and litterbox, as well as cleaning supplies. Disposable pads and some moistened washcloths in a baggie can help if your pet has an 'accident' in the kennel or car during travel. Make sure your pet has some form of ID with your current cell phone number on it, including cats.

Many dogs and cats love to ride in the car. Others are very anxious in the car and it can be a chore to even get them in the car (or carrier) at all! This causes anxiety for everyone. The first step in helping is to get them used to their crate or carrier at home. Leave it out for them to explore for several days in advance. Cat owners can go to <https://catfriendly.com/be-a-cat-friendly-caregiver/getting-cat-veterinarian/> for advice on getting the cat in the carrier for a car ride.

One of the main reasons dogs and cats are anxious about car travel is motion sickness. Did you ever get carsick when you were a kid? If you did, you probably remember it was awful. It's the same for our pets. Dogs will lick their lips, drool, and pant. Cats have it worse: they will often yowl incessantly, drool, foam, vomit, urinate, or defecate (or all of these) in the carrier. Contact your veterinarian for recommendations on medications, which are highly effective for motion sickness in dogs and cats. It's a good idea to do a trial run before the big trip, using the motion sickness medication as directed. Know that sedating or tranquilizing a pet during travel is not advised, as these medications can cause pets to have breathing problems, blood pressure problems, and trouble regulating their body temperature.

Pheromones and aromatherapy can both help your pets. Pheromones (Adaptil for dogs and Feliway for cats) are odorless message specific scents that can be sprayed on the floor boards, in your pet's carrier, and where your pet rides, 10 minutes in advance of travel. These can be obtained from your veterinarian or online and are proven to reduce stress and anxiety. Lavender has been shown to reduce anxiety in dogs when introduced for car rides.

While we like having our pets in the front seat to comfort them, having them secure in the back will prevent us from being distracted and prevent air bag injury in the event of an accident. The impact of a collision or even braking sharply can cause your unrestrained pet to fly forward and cause serious injury. Many unsecured pets are killed in car accidents or lost as they run away from the scene in a panic. The safest method of restraint pets for car travel is a kennel on the floor in the back seat or secured in the rear cargo area. The kennel should be well-ventilated and big enough for the pet to stand, sit, lie down, and turn around. Other restraint options include harnesses, seat belts, and pet barriers. Cat carriers can be buckled in with a seat belt. Many pets feel safer if the carrier is covered.

Never leave your pets unsupervised in a parked vehicle, regardless of the outside temperature, even when windows are left open. Plan breaks for every few hours; offer water and the opportunity to go to the bathroom. Don't let the cats out to use the litter box at rest areas: they rarely use it and it is unsafe to have them loose in the cabin of the car: they can dart out when the door is opened. If you are going to let them out, have a harness and leash on them and make sure someone is in the car with them to restrain them when the car doors are opened.

If you are thinking of travelling overseas with your pet, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website, and research the requirements and regulations for the location(s) you will be traveling to and through. This can be a lengthy and complex process, so contact your veterinarian as soon as you know your plans, so you can work together to create a timeline for necessary vaccinations, microchipping, ID tags, kennel markings, completion of health certifications, and other area-specific requirements, such as rabies titer testing.

Check with airlines about their pet travel requirements and kennel specifications. Each airline may vary, but general specifications can be found on the International Air Transport Association (IATA) website. Remember that if your pet is not riding in the

plane cabin with you, it will be in the (non-air conditioned) hold, so during the hottest months, it may not be allowed. Short-nosed, flat-faced, breeds may be prohibited from flying in cargo due to safety risks. Some examples are bulldogs, Boston terriers, boxers, and pugs, as well as Persian or Himalayan cats.

As you plan for that long-awaited vacation with your pet, preparation is key and can make a world of difference. Talk to your veterinarian with any further questions about travelling with your pet. Bon Voyage!

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians
dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.*