

Training Cats and Dogs to Love Car Rides

By Dr. Sophia Yin

Dogs and cats should be kept safe in vehicles either by confining them in travel crates or seat-belted them in place. Without restraint, some dogs won't wait until arriving at the park to start playing; to them, the car is their moving playground. Other pets are just a nuisance in the car and can distract the owners enough to cause a car accident. Additionally, when the driver is forced to suddenly swerve or stop, unrestrained pets are easily injured.



Fig.A

Fig.A: Cats and small dogs can travel in their safe-haven carrier, which should be belted to prevent the pet from being jostled about. A rough ride can cause the pet to become fearful.



Fig.B

Fig.B: A dog who won't be in a travel carrier should be on leash with someone holding the other end or seat-belted so that she remains somewhat stationary.

The First Car Ride



Fig.C

Fig.C: Start the car ride with the pet on an empty stomach. Give treats during the ride so that the pet associates it with good things. If she's hungry, she'll eat the treats once she's somewhat relaxed.



Fig.D

Fig.D: Hand-feed the treats sequentially or just toss a bunch into the crate or onto the seat. Note that if you're driving to a veterinary visit, limit the number of treats given in the car so the pet does not get satiated, since food may be used for counterconditioning at the hospital.

This page is excerpted from, *Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs and Cats*, by Dr. Sophia Yin. (www.nerdbook.com)

For more information about animal behavior, go to www.AskDrYin.com, where you can view free and subscription-based videos that provide step-by-step behavior modification instructions.

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Fig.E

Fig.E: If traveling alone, consider using the MannersMinder to dispense treats for both dogs and cats. This works best if they have already gone through part of the protocol for traveling and the animal has been previously trained using the MannersMinder. For dogs who learned to down-stay using the MannersMinder, require the dog to lie down first before having the machine automatically release treats.

Be sure that the first ride is short so that the pet doesn't have time to get nauseous. And consider the driver's driving skills—don't make the pet sick with fast turns and sudden stops. End in a location that your dog or cat likes. For most cats, this means returning home. Practice these short car rides until your pet acts relaxed all the time, then increase the driving distance. Usually, after only a few rides, dogs will be comfortable in the car; cats might require a few more trips.



Fig.F

Fig.F: If the dog gets car sick, consider trying Cerenia (Pfizer Animal Health, New York), an antiemetic (maropitant citrate) for motion sickness. Cerenia should be given at least 2 hours before travel but after food has been withheld for 1 hour, for fastest absorption. Because each treatment lasts 24 hours, it can be given 1 hour after the dog's dinner the night before the dog will travel in the car. To prevent gastric upset, it should be wrapped loosely in a small amount of food such as peanut butter, spreadable cheese or deli meat slices. Wrapping tightly in food such as placement in Pill Pockets, hot dogs or sausage will delay the absorption of the medication.

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TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING PATIENTS WHO LOVE THEIR VISITS