

Dr Segall's column December 2006

Pet care

by Peter Segall, DVM

Felines, at last

I have been told that I need to write an article which focuses on cats. The American Association of Feline Practitioners has published 2 articles which I think will interest cat owners. One I will share with you gives tips that help your cats have pleasant veterinary visits. This can make my job easier as well. The second article includes feeding tips to prevent obesity in your cats, a very common problem in house cats.

Sometimes I feel I need to treat the wounds of clients who risked life and limb trying to bring their cats to visit me. All four paws and mouth are in action at the same time and all have sharp protuberances. Fear is the primary cause of this behavior and since we know this, there are things we can do to alleviate it. The first step is getting the cat into the carrier. Oliver gets in his as soon as we bring it up because he was raised in one. If the carrier is left out (instead of being in the garage or basement covered in cobwebs and dirt), you can put food or treats in it. Your cat will learn to view it as a safe haven. A top-loading carrier with a removable top is best as cats don't like to be dumped (the gravity method).

Car rides can be scary and cats should always ride in a carrier. Short rides to places other than the vet's office will let the cat know that not every car ride will be traumatic. To avoid sickness and vomiting, it is best not to feed a cat who must travel. Getting a cat used to being handled by grooming, nail clipping, touching the ears and opening the mouth, can help your cat adjust better to the veterinary visit.

In the wild, cats hunt day and night, catching and eating frequent small meals. The exercise they get in this way keeps wild cats lean and very fit, physically and mentally. Domestic cats rarely work for their food. It is presented to them, sometimes once a day and sometimes in overabundance. A cat's obesity is the result of our abnormal way of feeding him. We humans need to make eating into a game to mimic the way a cat eats in the wild, providing exercise and excitement to help keep his weight down. Following are some examples.

1. Give your cat an interactive toy that dispenses food as the cat

rolls it.

2. Cut holes in a cardboard box or plastic jug so the cat has to paw his food out.

3. Try multiple small feedings. Hide food around the house for a cat to hunt.

4. Toss his kibbles and let him chase his food like prey.

The type of food is also important. Cats who are already obese can benefit from foods low in fats and carbs and high in fiber. Every brand has weight loss, less active or senior formulas. If your cat that wakes you up asking for food in the middle of the night, feed the largest meal just prior to bedtime.

I'm writing this in the country. Annie keeps barking every time a deer bounds across the lawn. When we're out and I shout to her to stop chasing the deer she stops at the forest edge. She's becoming quite obedient. She chased and caught so many Frisbees this week that she's getting back into fighting trim. Oliver wants to wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season and to remind you to be careful of stray Christmas ornaments and wrapping ribbon, which can cause big trouble if eaten by dogs and cats

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