



symptoms of toxoplasmosis at birth, but many are likely to develop signs of infection later in life. Loss of vision, mental retardation, loss of hearing, and death in severe cases, are the symptoms of toxoplasmosis in congenitally infected children.

In immunodeficient people—those undergoing immunosuppressive therapy (e.g., for cancer or organ transplantation) or those with an immunosuppressive disease such as AIDS—enlargement of the lymph nodes, ocular and central nervous-system disturbances, respiratory disease, and heart disease are among the more characteristic symptoms. In these patients—especially those with AIDS—relapses of the disease are common, and the mortality rate is high.

In the past, immunodeficient people and pregnant women were advised to avoid cats. However, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) now advises that this is not necessary.

What can I do to prevent toxoplasmosis?

There are several general sanitation and food safety steps you can take to reduce your chances of becoming infected with *Toxoplasma*:

- Do not eat raw or undercooked meat. Meat should be cooked to a temperature of at least 160°F for 20 minutes.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk.
- Do not eat unwashed fruits and vegetables.
- Wash hands and food preparation surfaces with warm soapy water after handling raw meat.
- Wear gloves when gardening. Wash hands after gardening.
- Wash hands before eating (especially for children).
- Keep children's sandboxes covered.
- Do not drink water from the environment unless it is boiled.
- Do not feed raw meat or undercooked meat to cats. Also, do not give them unpasteurized milk.
- Do not allow cats to hunt or roam.
- Do not allow cats to use a garden or children's play area as their litter box.
- Remove feces from the litter box daily and clean with boiling or scalding water.
- Pregnant women, and persons with suppressed immune systems, should not clean the litter box.
- Control rodent populations and other potential intermediate hosts.

About the Cornell Feline Health Center

This brochure was prepared by the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the Cornell Feline Health Center, Cornell University, College of Veterinary Medicine, Ithaca, NY 14853-6401. The center is committed to improving the health of cats by developing methods to prevent or cure feline diseases and by providing continuing education to veterinarians and cat owners. Much of that work is made possible by the financial support of friends.

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Toxoplasmosis in Cats



What is toxoplasmosis?

Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by a single-celled parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* (*T. gondii*). Toxoplasmosis is one of the most common parasitic diseases and has been found in nearly all warm-blooded animals, including pets and humans. Despite the high prevalence of *T. gondii* infection, the parasite rarely causes significant clinical disease in cats—or any species.

What causes toxoplasmosis?

The life cycle of *Toxoplasma gondii* is complex and involves two types of host—definitive and intermediate. Cats, both wild and domestic, are the only definitive hosts for *Toxoplasma gondii*. This means that the parasite can only produce oocysts (eggs) when infecting a cat. When a cat ingests an infected prey (or other infected raw meat) the parasite is released into the cat's digestive tract. The organisms then multiply in the wall of the small intestine and produce oocysts during what is known as the intrainestinal infection cycle. These oocysts are then excreted in great numbers in the cat's feces. Cats previously unexposed to *T. gondii* will usually begin shedding oocysts between three and 10 days after ingestion of infected tissue, and continue shedding for around 10 to 14 days, during which time many millions of oocysts may be produced. Oocysts are very resistant and may survive in the environment for well over a year.

During the intrainestinal infection cycle in the cat, some *T. gondii* organisms released from the ingested cysts penetrate more deeply into the wall of the intestine and multiply as tachyzoite forms. These forms then spread out from the intestine to other parts of the cat's body, starting the extraintestinal infection cycle. Eventually, the cat's immune system restrains this stage of the organism, which then enters a dormant or "resting" stage by forming cysts in muscles and brain. These cysts contain bradyzoites, or slowly multiplying organisms.

Other animals, including humans, are intermediate hosts of *Toxoplasma gondii*. These hosts can become infected but do not produce oocysts. Oocysts passed in a cat's feces are not immediately infectious to other animals. They must first go through a process called sporulation, which takes one to five days depending on environmental conditions. Once sporulated, oocysts are infectious to cats, people, and other intermediate hosts. Intermediate hosts become infected through ingestion of sporulated oocysts, and this infection results in formation of tissue cysts in various tissues of the body. Tissue cysts remain in the intermediate host for life and are infectious to cats, people and other intermediate hosts if the cyst-containing tissue is eaten.

How will toxoplasmosis affect my cat?

Most cats infected with *T. gondii* will not show any symptoms. Occasionally, however, clinical disease—toxoplasmosis—occurs. When disease does occur, it may develop when the cat's immune response is not adequate to stop the spread of tachyzoite forms. The disease is more likely to occur in cats with suppressed immune systems, including young kittens and cats with feline leukemia virus (FELV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV).

The most common symptoms of toxoplasmosis include fever, loss of appetite, and lethargy. Other symptoms may occur depending on whether the infection is acute or chronic, and where the parasite is found in the body. In the lungs, *T. gondii* infection can lead to pneumonia, which will cause respiratory distress of gradually increasing severity. Toxoplasmosis can also affect the eyes and central nervous system, producing inflammation of the retina or anterior ocular chamber, abnormal pupil size and responsiveness to light, blindness, incoordination, heightened sensitivity to touch, personality changes, circling, head pressing, twitching of the ears, difficulty in chewing and swallowing food, seizures, and loss of control over urination and defecation.

How is toxoplasmosis diagnosed in cats?

Toxoplasmosis is usually diagnosed based on the history, signs of illness, and the results of supportive laboratory tests. Measurement of IgG and IgM antibodies to *Toxoplasma gondii* in the blood can help diagnose toxoplasmosis. The presence of significant IgG antibodies to *T. gondii* in a healthy cat suggests that the cat has been previously infected and now is most likely immune and not excreting oocysts. The presence of significant IgM antibodies to *T. gondii*, however, suggests an active infection of the cat. The absence of *T. gondii* antibodies of both types in a healthy cat suggests that the cat is susceptible to infection and thus would shed oocysts for one to two weeks following infection.

Sometimes the oocysts can be found in the feces, but this is not a reliable method of diagnosis because they look similar to some other parasites. Also, cats shed the oocysts for only a short period of time and often are not shedding the oocysts when they are showing signs of disease. A definitive diagnosis requires microscopic examination of tissues or tissue impression smears for distinctive pathologic changes and the presence of tachyzoites.

Can toxoplasmosis be treated?

Most cats that have toxoplasmosis can recover with treatment. Treatment usually involves a course of an antibiotic called Clindamycin. Other drugs that are used include pyrimethamine and sulfadiazine, which act together to inhibit *T. gondii* reproduction. Treatment must be started as soon as possible after diagnosis and continued for several days after signs have disappeared. In acute illness, treatment is sometimes started on the basis of a high antibody titer in the first test. If clinical improvement is not seen within two to three days, the diagnosis of toxoplasmosis should be questioned.

No vaccine is as yet available to prevent either *T. gondii* infection or toxoplasmosis in cats, humans, or other species.

Can I "catch" toxoplasmosis from my cat?

Because cats only shed the organism for a few days in their entire life, the chance of human exposure is small. Owning a cat does not mean you will be infected with the disease. It is unlikely that you would be exposed to the parasite by touching an infected cat, because cats usually do not carry the parasite on their fur. It is also unlikely that you can become infected through cat bites or scratches. In addition, cats kept indoors that do not hunt prey or are not fed raw meat are not likely to be infected with *T. gondii*.

In the United States, people are much more likely to become infected through eating raw meat and unwashed fruits and vegetables than from handling cat feces.

How are people infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*?

Contact with oocyst-contaminated soil is probably the major means by which many different species—rodents, ground-feeding birds, sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle, as well as humans living in developing countries—are exposed to *Toxoplasma gondii*. In the industrialized nations, most transmission to humans is probably due to eating undercooked infected meat, particularly lamb and pork. People also become infected by eating unwashed fruits and vegetables. The organism can sometimes be present in some unpasteurized dairy products, such as goat's milk. *Toxoplasma gondii* can also be transmitted directly from pregnant woman to unborn child when the mother becomes infected during pregnancy.

There are two populations at high risk for infection with *Toxoplasma gondii*; pregnant women and immunodeficient individuals. Congenital infection is of greatest concern in humans. About one-third to one-half of human infants born to mothers who have acquired *Toxoplasma* during that pregnancy are infected. The vast majority of women infected during pregnancy have no symptoms of the infection themselves. The majority of infected infants will show no



CAT
Friendly
PRACTICE

A Guide to Creating a ***Cat Friendly Practice***



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An AAFP Cat Friendly Practice



Having a practice that is genuinely 'cat friendly' involves at least three distinct aspects:

- First, is the attitude and approach that the whole healthcare team take towards feline patients and their owners. Along with this, it is important that the practice has a proactive approach to client communication and education. The entire practice culture should reflect an ongoing concern for improving the care delivered for cats.
- Second, it is important that practice staff undergo continuing professional development to keep up to date with developments in feline medicine and surgery, and in all aspects of cat care. Measures should also be in place to ensure practice outcomes are being monitored and that improvements are being made where necessary.
- Third, it is important that the practice has an appropriate design and layout, and has appropriate equipment, facilities, and instruments to ensure feline patients can be cared for in the best possible way.

These three aspects are all extremely important and combine together to form a practice that is both 'cat friendly' and 'cat caring.' All Cat Friendly Practices should utilize information from AAFP Guidelines (www.catvets.com/guidelines/) and include the recommendations from these publications into the information above. As you evaluate your practice, be creative about strategies to implement cat friendly change and be willing to improve as you become more familiar with these ideas. The next section allows you to look at all the different aspects in your own practice to achieve a higher standard of cat friendliness.



An AAFP Cat Friendly Practice

Developing the Right Attitude and Approach to Feline Patients



An appropriate attitude is necessary in order to approach the cat in a way that will result in delivering the most effective care. The Cat Friendly Practice should set an example of tolerance, empathy, and understanding of basic feline behavior and be able to modify the approach to each individual cat in a way that reduces the stress and anxiety of the visit to the practice. The cat has endured a great deal of cultural bias and general misconception about the significance and meaning of many of its behaviors. It is essential that accurate information about cats is understood. Have staff with a positive attitude to cats and staff who are knowledgeable about their needs both in and outside the veterinary practice setting. Encourage all staff members to develop a calm approach, realizing that 'less is more' when handling and restraining cats. All members of the practice team should be well versed in feline friendly strategies relevant to their positions in the practice.

In addition to knowing and understanding cats and their unique needs as veterinary patients, understanding the cat owner is also vital. Help the cat owner with the difficulties and the challenges of not only getting their cat to the practice for care, but also administering care at home.

A Practice with a Good Attitude to Cats and Owners Will:

- Have a team who understands cat owners and the challenges in getting a cat to the practice.
- Have a practice that understands cats and is overtly welcoming to cats.
- Have a team who knows how to behave towards and around cats.
- Have a team who understands and takes note of the behavior of the cats when in the practice, and can modify their approach appropriately in response.
- Have a team who is well trained in the handling of feline patients. Crucially, the handling of cats must be done in a way that reduces rather than increases stress, which means that heavy restraint is avoided. The team embodies the principles of respectful handling.
- Have a team that applies 'cat friendly' principles and are knowledgeable in all aspects of the care they provide for cats and cat owners.
- Have a team that encourages the best possible preventive healthcare care for cats.
- Have a team who is willing to work together to continually improve on the ways that they provide care for cats.



For the cat and owner, nothing is worse than members of the healthcare team who give the impression that they are disinterested in cats or do not understand them. Owners will see when staff shows annoyance, frustration or distaste for the fearful and anxious cat. Clients will be much more relieved and relaxed if staff shows more understanding and a knowledgeable approach to handling and if they feel that the staff is actively invested in helping improve their cat's experience.

Have Staff Who Understand Cats and Cat Owners

In addition to knowing and understanding cats and their unique needs as veterinary patients, understanding the cat owner too is vital. For many owners, the process of taking a cat to the practice is traumatic. They will have had to find and catch the cat, try to confine it in a carrier, take it away from its natural environment and territory, transport it in a car, and then bring it into the practice. For most cats this is a highly stressful event, and that inevitably causes distress to clients also. Understanding the implications of veterinary visits for cat owners, and what needs to be done to reduce the negative impact this has, will help enormously.

First Impressions

Often, the person to make the first impression on the client will be the one who answers the telephone and makes the initial appointment. The right attitude starts before the cat enters the front door of the practice. Much can be done at this initial stage to make the client feel at ease and to also help facilitate a 'low stress' visit. Make the effort to inquire at the time an appointment is made about the comfort level a client has with coming into the practice. Appropriate preparation for the visit can save a great deal of time and distress to all. The receptionist can have a staff member call back for a more in depth discussion as indicated. This step can facilitate the subsequent clinical examination and also provide the environment and impression to encourage the client to return again in the future.

The 2011 AAFP/ISFM Feline Friendly Handling Guidelines address detailed recommendations for veterinary staff to use in their client education efforts to make the physical act of getting to the veterinarian less stressful. Integrating what we know about the cat's natural behaviors when exposed to new and anxiety provoking circumstances can help the veterinary staff be more empathetic in the assessments and more effective in their recommendations. Using positive reinforcing behavior modification techniques is the corner stone of acclimating a cat to the carrier, car ride and experiences it will likely be exposed to in a veterinary practice. The use of an appropriate carrier can greatly facilitate reducing anxiety, both in travel itself, as well as once the cat is at the practice. Refer to the Feline Friendly Handling Guidelines for the most current information about the specific details for client recommendations. Also available is a client brochure called "Getting Your Cat to the Veterinarian," which includes tips and strategies for cat owners. Both can be found on the AAFP website at www.catvets.com/guidelines/

Advising owners on the most appropriate ways to bring the cat to the practice and helping them remain calm and relaxed has a very positive effect, both on the client and the cat. The cat will be exposed to many stressors such as:

- A strange cat carrier
- An unfamiliar car journey
- Strange smells, sights and noises on the journey and in the practice
- Unfamiliar people and animals, both of which can be highly threatening
- Being handled and examined by unfamiliar people in an unfamiliar environment
- Potentially having investigative procedures done and being hospitalized at the practice





The goal is for the cat to learn to associate the carrier with positive experiences & routinely enter voluntarily. You can explain to your clients:

- Make the carrier a familiar place at home by leaving it in a room where your cat spends a lot of time.
- Place familiar soft bedding inside of the carrier. Bedding or clothing with your scent can make them feel more secure.
- Place treats, catnip or toys inside the carrier to encourage the cat to enter at home. Often, you will first see that treats are removed from the carrier during the night.
- It may take days or weeks before your cat starts to trust the carrier. Remain calm, patient and reward desired behaviors.
- If you still have trouble, you may need to assess the carrier itself.

What Type of Carriers are Best? Recommendations to your clients should include:

- The best carriers are inexpensive hard-sided carriers that open from the top and the front, and can also be taken apart in the middle. An easily removable top allows a cat who is fearful, anxious, or in pain to stay in the bottom half of the carrier for examinations. Your veterinarian can often do the examination in the bottom of a well-designed carrier. Avoid carriers that require a cat to be pulled from or dumped out for an examination.
- Choose carriers that are sturdy, secure, and stable for the cat, as well as easy for you to carry. Carriers should be seat-belted into the car to keep your cat safer and to reduce the bumpiness of the ride.
- Some cats like to see out, whereas others are less anxious when the carrier is covered with a blanket or towel to prevent seeing the unfamiliar.

If a cat needs to come to the practice right away, and is not yet accustomed to the carrier, the following recommendations may help clients:

- Start by putting the carrier in a small room with few hiding places. Bring the cat into the room and close the door. Move slowly and commonly. Do not chase the cat to get them into the carrier. Encourage the cat with treats or toys to walk into the carrier.

- If your cat will not walk into the carrier, and your carrier has an opening on the top, gently cradle your cat and lower into the carrier. Another option is to remove the top half of your carrier while getting the cat to go into the bottom half, and then calmly replace the top.
- Use familiar bedding inside the carrier. Consider use of synthetic feline facial pheromone (Feliway®) analog spray in the carrier at least 30 minutes prior to transport to help calm the cat.

You will need to make recommendations to clients about returning home to a multi-cat household. Cats are very sensitive to smells, and unfamiliar smells can result in one cat no longer recognizing another. Aggressive behavior can occur when one cat senses another as a stranger. These suggestions can help avoid problems between cats following a veterinary visit:

- Leave the returning cat in the carrier for a few minutes to see how all your cats react.
- If all cats appear calm and peaceful, let the returning cat out of the carrier.
- If you sense tension between the cats, or if previous home-comings have resulted in conflict, keep the cat in the carrier and take it to a separate room to avoid potential injury from an upset cat. Provide food, water, and litter box for a minimum of 24 hours to regain the more familiar smell of home.
- If there is still stress after this time, contact your veterinarian for more advice on slower introduction or medication to help the process.
- A synthetic feline pheromone (Feliway®) can help provide the sense of familiarity.
- For future visits use familiar bedding or clothing with your scent as it retains the smell of home and helps with reintroduction. Use a synthetic feline pheromone (Feliway®). Bringing both cats to the veterinary practice together can prevent future conflict as both cats will carry the scent of the practice.

The client needs to understand they are a very important member of the cat's healthcare team. The client can be instrumental in helping their cat have more relaxed veterinary visits and improved healthcare.

Cat Advocate

Having a 'cat advocate' in the practice that can be the point person for educating the whole practice and encouraging everyone will be very beneficial both to the practice and to the clients. The advocate should understand cats and be able to facilitate developing a practice culture and education efforts to ensure that the practice policies and procedures support a cat friendly environment.

This person does not have to be a veterinarian, and often a technician or other practice staff may fulfill this role successfully.

Have Staff Who Know How to Behave Towards and Around Cats

It is important that the veterinary healthcare team understands normal cat behavior and why cats react as they do at the veterinary practice.

Understanding normal feline senses:

- The cat's sense of smell is far more acute than ours, and cats sense their environment through scent.
- Wearing strong perfumes or excessive use of air fresheners should be avoided.
- Recognize that the normal smells of the practice can be alarming to the cat. Ventilate rooms and rinse off disinfectants thoroughly as directed by the manufacturer. Wherever possible, use disinfectants that are not highly scented.
- Cats returning home with the scent of the practice – especially cats that have been hospitalized – may not be recognized by other household cats, leading to upset and fights. Clients should be educated how to reintroduce cats.
- Be aware of the cats' sensitivity to sound (and sight) – cats have much more acute hearing than humans or dogs, and this needs to be taken into consideration. The practice and staff need to try to avoid sights or sounds that will cause unnecessary distress.
- Be aware that cats are away from their normal territory – while a number of cats can cope well with being taken out of their normal environment, many more find this very challenging and stressful. Simply being aware that the cat is likely to be stressed, and responding appropriately (gentle, empathetic approach, keeping cats separate from other pets and from each other, etc.) will be very helpful.
- The synthetic facial pheromone analog (Feliway®) can help comfort the cat and reduce stress. Diffusers can be used in the waiting room, examination rooms, treatment area and cat wards. Spray can be used in carriers and cages, on towels and uniforms. Although helpful, it must be used in conjunction with a cat friendly practice environment and respectful handling of feline patients.



Have Staff Who Know How to Handle Cats

Appropriate handling of cats is crucial. Cats generally display fearful or anxious behaviors to unfamiliar people and situations. Their body language may incorporate subtle changes that can be misunderstood or may not be recognized. Often fear and pain are overlooked as causes of aggression. Recognizing the early, subtle signals of anxiety will allow techniques to be used to defuse the arousal before it escalates to full blown fear aggression.

All practice members should be taught how to handle the cat respectfully and with understanding. We rarely give enough thought to the art of handling cats well. Adopting a 'less is more' approach is an important concept to cat handling. Cats generally respond better to minimal restraint. Many cats are frightened, but if they can be gently reassured rather than heavily restrained, this will help prevent most cats from becoming defensively aggressive. Have staff members that are best at handling work with cats that are the most fearful or fearfully aggressive. Scruffing the cat should not be used routinely for restraint and cats should never be lifted and held up by the scruff. Grabbing and immediately scruffing or heavily restraining a cat can be highly intimidating and often provokes defensive aggression.

- Always approach a cat in a calm and soothing manner. Don't look the cat in the eye on first contact – look past it and blink slowly. Stroking and talking to the cat before handling is ideal if the cat allows this. From behind, rub your hands gently over the cat's own pheromone centers (above the bridge of the nose and the preauricular area). Let the cat sniff your hand first to gauge response before you attempt physical contact. The cat will often then put its head in your hands, which is very impressive to clients!
- Have items such as thick towels available for calm use if required.
- Being moved around on a slippery surface can be quite stressful. A towel, blanket or rubber mat prevents discomfort and makes the cat feel more secure. Preferably, this should be familiar to the cat, and with the scent of the cat or a familiar person already on it. A comfortable bed on the table or bottom half of the carrier can comfort cats and reduce stress..
- Use clothing and materials that minimize static as these can startle and alarm the cat.

Handling Cats in the Hospital Environment

Many cats respond well to human interaction. Making time for staff to play, stroke (gently, especially over the forehead, around the ears, or under the chin) and groom the cat will significantly reduce stress in many hospitalized cats. However, different cats will enjoy different things; assess each individually as some cats prefer to be left alone, and these cats should be handled minimally (just as much as needed to perform needed testing and/or treatment).

- Handle cats quietly and gently, but recognize when they need or want to be left alone.
- Try to limit the number of personnel around hospitalized cats and view the environment from their perspective, particularly bearing in mind their sensitive senses of hearing and smell.
- Consistency, predictability and feeling in control are very important for cat welfare.
- Quiet music played in a hospital may have a calming effect.
- A quiet area for minor procedures such as collecting blood, performing blood pressure assessment and inducing anesthesia is essential. Let the cat get used to the room before starting any procedure.
- Educate all staff that staring and intrusive or rough handling (or stroking) can be stressful for most cats and highly detrimental for many.
- If possible, provide a separate room for owners to visit their hospitalized cat to avoid disturbing the other cats and to give them time to settle and interact.
- Carefully observe the behavior of each cat, and be prepared to implement changes immediately if problems become apparent.
- If cats are being boarded at the practice, a dedicated boarding ward is preferable.
- Cats with infectious diseases should be isolated from other cats.
- Treats may be used to create a positive association with the hospital.

The AAFP/ISFM Feline Friendly Handling Guidelines provide an excellent resource for further information on handling and practices are expected to have policies that comply with these guidelines (available on AAFP website – www.catvets.com/professionals/guidelines/).



Communication Between the Practice and the Client

Effective communication between the practice and the client is vitally important in delivering comprehensive care to the feline patient. Again, it is important that communications are done in an empathetic and understanding way, and that clients are given the opportunity to contribute to any discussions and voice any concerns. Clients should be involved in all treatment plan decisions and those decisions should be individualized for each patient and the patient's owner as well. Effective communication not only applies to clinical investigations and treatments, but to all aspects of client communication. For example, clients should be informed and respectfully asked about their cat's past behaviors in the veterinary practice when booking an appointment; procedures should be explained to them and what to expect when they arrive at the practice; and advice should be given, if necessary, on how best to transport the cat to the practice. Giving owner's time to ask questions and asking them open-ended questions (e.g., what additional information might be helpful for you and your cat?) is also important in gauging how well they have understood what you have explained.

Important aspects of client communication, and some ways that this can be enhanced include:

- Being able to communicate directly with all or virtually all clients who attend the practice. This may be by mail, email, text message, telephone or social media, and the technique may differ between practices and between clients. However, some form of communication is essential for reminding clients when routine prophylactic therapy is due (e.g., examinations and vaccine reminders, parasite prevention, follow up care for chronic illnesses, etc.), and ideally the practice should be taking the opportunity to undertake further proactive communications through resources such as a practice newsletter. Tailor technical contact or language to clients as they will vary greatly in medical and veterinary knowledge.
- All staff members should wear nametags. Nametags should include the team member's name, as well as position or title.
- Whenever investigations and treatments are being discussed with clients, it is important that the different options that are appropriate and available for the case are talked about openly with the client. The client should be provided with reasonable estimated costs, and these should be provided in writing. Whenever investigations and/or treatments go beyond initial estimates, clients should be informed at the earliest possible time and where necessary further discussions should take place over options that may be available. When charging for work that has been done, fully itemized invoices should be made available to clients on request.
- In a non-feline exclusive practice, it may be helpful to have one or more staff members whose primary focus is cats. This person or these people do not necessarily have to be veterinarians, and may be technicians or other staff members. They should be people who are naturally empathetic with cats and their owners and who have a good understanding of cat behavior and how to handle and approach cats. They should have good communication skills as they will have staff training responsibilities, as well as client education. The 'cat advocate' can also be asked to take responsibility for ensuring 'cat friendly standards' are being met within the practice.

- Feedback should be encouraged from clients. The practice should have a policy outlining how clients are able to make a formal complaint and how these are handled by the practice. The complaints policy should be made known to clients upon request. Additionally, signage in the examination rooms or reception area encouraging feedback may encourage clients who may not think to ask, or may be reluctant to do so.
- Provision of relevant printed material to supplement verbal information conveyed during a consultation is strongly recommended, as a substantial proportion of any verbal communication is likely to be rapidly forgotten. In addition, printed client information handouts or brochures should be made available in the waiting/ reception area and proactively used to address common issues. The client booklet – ‘Welcome to a Cat Friendly Practice’ provides cat owners with information on your cat friendly practice and provides weblinks for valuable resources. The AAFP Cat Friendly Practices will receive these brochures in their marketing toolkit after they complete the self-assessment checklist. Advice on appropriate, reliable and accurate websites may be appreciated.



Provision of Care Outside of Normal Hours

While not all practices will be able to provide continuous 24-hour care for hospitalized cats, or provide a 24-hour emergency service, it is important that clients understand the level of care provided and what to do in an emergency situation. Therefore:

- A policy should be in place on how to handle emergency treatment of cats outside of normal practice hours. Clients should be given clear instructions on how to obtain emergency treatment for their cat through client informational materials, voicemail message and/or contacting a practice team member. Clients should not be left in doubt as to how to obtain prompt emergency care for their cat when it is required. Emergency medical care options outside of regular business hours may also be posted inside the practice, on the entryway door and on the practice website.
- For cats that are hospitalized overnight or on weekends/public holidays when the practice is not normally open, clients should be clearly informed of the level of staffing in these situations and how frequently the cats are examined. While continuous monitoring of hospitalized cats outside normal working hours may be unachievable in many situations, clients should always be informed about the level of care and monitoring that will be provided. Additionally, clients must be made aware of other options for after-hour care where monitoring is available so that they can make informed decisions for after-hour care for their cat.
- The pros and cons of any decision to hospitalize a patient outside of regular business hours should be thoroughly discussed with the client so that any decision to hospitalize a patient during these hours is a fully informed decision.



Clinical Skills, Training and Development of Staff

Continuing Professional Development

Good clinical practice should not only involve keeping up to date with knowledge, but this should be applied in the practice setting. Practice protocols and treatment should be updated based on 'best practice.' Continuing education is critical to ensure good practice. This can be provided in a number of different forms, for example:

- Attendance at conferences
- 'Online' webinars and resources (VIN/approved association forums)
- Distance education courses
- Private reading of journals/articles/papers
- Staff education

It is recommended that:

- Veterinarians undertake a minimum of 20 hours of CE every two years. Personal/private study (reading journals, books, or other publications) is also recommended.
- Technicians undertake minimum of 10 hours every two years, and again personal/private study is recommended.
- A significant proportion of the CE undertaken by both veterinarians and technicians should be feline-related, but the exact proportion may need to be approximately in line with the proportion of their clinical time spent undertaking feline work.
- The practice can provide education to all staff members, perhaps during staff meetings or trainings. The CFP Cat Advocate can help in initiating this education.

Written records of the continuing education undertaken by all staff in the practice, whether through attendance at meetings, through online or e-learning, should be kept and monitored.

Practice Library and Availability of Reference Materials

It is important that a range of current up-to-date relevant reference materials are available to support both veterinarians, technicians and other practice staff. These should include, but are not limited to:

- Current relevant feline-specific textbooks.
- Current relevant feline-specific journals.
- Access to the guidelines published by the AAFP.

Both the American Association of Feline Practitioners and the International Society of Feline Medicine produce a range of materials that are relevant and helpful to veterinarians in clinical practice, including the Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery. It is required that at least one veterinarian in the practice must be a member of the American Association of Feline Practitioners.

Good Clinical Practice

Good clinical practice should not only involve keeping current with veterinary knowledge pertaining to cats, but should be applied effectively in the practice setting.

Ongoing monitoring is encouraged to assess clinical outcomes and to help identify where improvements should be made. Veterinarians should review clinical practices to discuss clinical outcomes to help identify areas that may require attention. This may be in the form of regular practice meetings, and it should also incorporate 'morbidity and mortality' rounds, where cases that have developed unexpected complications or have died unexpectedly are reviewed in order to determine if any policy changes are needed to avoid problems in the future.

Opportunities to discuss clinical protocols, procedures and cases with peers outside of the practice is encouraged to help learn from others experiences. Some examples of this are the AAFP listserve, VIN, and the AAFP Rounds on VIN.

Creating a Cat Friendly Practice



Many of the techniques contained in the checklist are readily achievable and focus on approach, organization and attitude. The techniques and strategies are easy to implement. The most important step is to recognize that there is a need to make the adaptations in the first place. By incorporating these recommendations into your practice, you will provide better care for cats and develop more lasting and productive bonds with your clients.

You can now proceed to the Cat Friendly Practice Standards Checklist. You will need to review the checklist and incorporate any changes to your practice as necessary. It is important to note there are two standards – Gold and Silver. The Silver Standard is for practices that meet all of the essential standard criteria for a Cat Friendly Practice. The Gold Standard is for practices that have incorporated the optimum level of Cat Friendly criteria. Some examples of the additional criteria for the Gold Standard include attending an AAFP Conference every two years, having raised surfaces available in the waiting area, a dedicated feline examination room, a cat-only hospitalization ward, a dental suite separate from the surgery suite and having dental radiographs to assess teeth.

Once you have gone through the checklist by assessing that your practice incorporates all of the standards, it will be submitted for approval. After approval you will become an **AAFP Cat Friendly Practice!**

Cat Friendly Practice Program Checklist

Congratulations on taking the first step toward becoming a Cat Friendly Practice.

To be considered for the Cat Friendly Practice Program we ask that you to complete this practice assessment. The assessment, structured as a checklist, will help guide practitioners through the steps needed to achieve this status. The checklist details two distinct practice levels: **Silver** and **Gold**. We appreciate your time and interest in this process.

A Program Offered by the American Association of Feline Practitioners

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To become a Cat Friendly Practice, visit www.catvets.com.



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