

Special Equipment for Handling Cats

Our topics for this week are:

- Cat restraint bags
- Cat muzzles
- Gloves with gauntlets
- Loops on a flexible rod
- Nets
- Capture tongs
- Cage shield
- Squeeze cage
- Head movement-limiting devices
- Pinch-induced behavior inhibition

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

Cat Restraint Bag

Canvas or nylon cat bags tend to calm cats after they are zipped in. Bags provide excellent restraint without the need to tightly restrict movement as with hand holds or towel wraps. Zipped leg openings permit access to leg veins for venipuncture. Restraint by an assistant is minimal and safety is high for cats and handlers. However, bags are for cats that may resent a procedure such as venipuncture, not overtly aggressive cats or cats already distressed.

Cats should be relatively quiet and handled gently to be placed in the bag properly. To put a cat in a restraint bag, the handler opens the bag and places it on a table. The cat is then placed on top of the bag. The neck portion of the bag is first clasped around the cat's neck after which the bag is placed around the cat. It is important to zip the bag with one or two fingers under the zipper to prevent the cat's hair from getting caught in the zipper. Smaller zippered ports are present for access to legs.

A cat in a bag should never be left unattended. Although once in the bag a cat usually does not struggle to move, they still should be continuously supervised to ensure they cannot roll off a table. After the procedure is completed, the cat should be slowly removed and petted in stages when they are quiet to prepare them for a possible need to use a restraint bag again in the future.

Loose fitting mesh restraint bags with a pull string opening for minor restraint may be of value in handling cats during bathes, brief transport, or administering medication.

Muzzles

Leather, nylon, or cloth cat muzzles are open ended muzzles designed to cover the eyes. Cloth muzzles pose less risk for injuring the eyes. Cats are often quieted by being blindfolded with the muzzle. However, if the cat resists the muzzle, their feet must be well restrained. A one hand hold restraint of the head may be easier to maintain with the traction provided by a muzzle.

Gloves with Gauntlets

Leather gloves with gauntlets are excellent protection against scratches, but some cats can bite through them. If there is danger of biting, the hand should be partially inserted in the glove. The empty fingers of the glove can then be offered as a distraction, while the cat is captured by other means. However, leather gloves may carry stressful odors and exacerbate a cat's anxiety. Gloves also desensitize the handler's hands to the pressure being exerted for restraint which can contribute to the cat escaping restraint or being injured by excessive restraint.

Loop on a Flexible Rod

Leads with slip rings can be placed over the head to capture a cat by the neck to control the head while a hand is used to scoop up the body. A commercial loop on a flexible rod is made for capture of cats. The loop on a flexible rod works well to quietly place a slip leash on a cat's neck and gently pull it snug on the neck similar to the Mongolian uurga used to capture horses. The flexible rod should not be used to bend the leash and snap on the cat.

Nets

Opposing nets on metal frames attached with pivot points are available to restrain cats. They create a giant salad tong-like restraint tool that can be used to entrap a cat in a cage and remove it. With support under the cat's body while it is still in the netting and transport it short distances. The netting can also restrain a cat for administering medications or chemical restraint. It is effective if the cat is entrapped in a standard cage at handler chest height. It is not effective for capturing cats in the open on the ground or a floor.

Commercial hoop nets on long poles are available for capture and restraint of cats. Nylon mesh laundry bags can also be used. The size of the mesh in the netting should be sufficiently small (one-fourth inches, or less) to prevent cat entanglement and injury.

Capture Tong

Cat tongs are long-handled clamps for capture and restraint of vicious cats by the neck. The tongs are used to clamp the neck and restrain the head just before other means of restraint are applied. The pressure on the neck, applied by tongs, is difficult to control when a cat is struggling and if the body is not controlled at the same time the tongs are used, a struggling cat could break its neck.

Cage Shield

A cage shield is a wooden or metal frame the same height and width of the inside of a cage, covered with mesh wire, and with a center brace and a centrally placed handle. The shield is slid into a slightly opened cage door and used to push a fractious cat against the back of its cage to administer chemical restraint.

Squeeze Cage

Wire cages are available with a sliding partition that permits a cat to be compressed inside a cage so that minor procedures can be performed or chemical restraint administered. Use of squeeze cages should be restricted to the most vicious cats and preferably for one time use on a cat.

Head Movement-Limiting Devices

Elizabethan collars are applied as with dogs. If tolerated by the cat, the collar will restrain cats from chewing on its hindquarters. They can also provide the handler some protection from being bit while handling or restraining the cat.

Elizabethan collars must be removed to allow eating and drinking. Spherical semi-opaque (globe-shield) collars that encapsulate the head and have an opening in front for breathing and vision are commercially available as a means to protect handlers from bites. Globe shield collars do not allow drinking or eating and must be frequently taken on and off, which could actually increase the risk of being bitten.

Thick broad collars wrap snugly around the neck like a human cervical collar to limit the cat's ability to reach areas of its body. A retention strap is run from the top of the broad band around the lower aspect of the thorax behind the front legs. Broad band cervical collars permit better peripheral vision and hearing and does not catch on objects as does the Elizabethan collar. They also allow eating and drinking. However, access to most of the front legs is possible. Cervical collars for movement limitation can also be pneumatic. Heavy canvas construction is needed for protection from cat claws.

Pinch-Induced Behavioral Inhibition

Two-inch paper clip binders, bent to reduce the pressure applied, have been recommended to be used on the loose skin of the upper neck as a "twitch" to distract difficult to handle cats in the same manner as scruffing. It is theorized that the pinching simulates being carried as a small kitten by the queen. However, freezing from fear may be another possibility. Similar commercially produced clips for cat restraint are also marketed.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- Special handling equipment is rarely needed if cats are minimally restrained and distraction techniques are used.
- Special handling equipment is less often needed for cats that have been humanely declawed
- Restraint bags are for cats that may become agitated, not cats already agitated

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint* published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Don't forget serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.