

Moving Cats and Going In or Out of Cages

Our topics for this week are:

- Carrying cats
- Using cat crates
- Inserting cats in cages
- Removing cats from cages
- Trimming nails

MOVING CATS

Carried in Arms

When a handler carries a cat, the cat should have a slip leash applied first and then be picked up with the handler's right palm under the cat's chest with an index finger between the front legs at the junction with the chest. The left hand, while holding the slip leash is placed lightly on back of the cat's neck and top of its shoulders. If distraction techniques (petting, scratching) are insufficient to control the cat, the cat can be scruffed with left hand.

An alternative hold is to allow the cat's sternum to be supported by the right wrist while the left foreleg is grasped with the right hand. Both restrains prevent the cat from climbing up the handler's chest.

Transport in Crates

Transport crates are useful in securing cats when they are moved. When confined to a strapped down crate in a vehicle, cats are prevented from escapes during loading or unloading or through open windows. They also cannot become a distraction to driving or a missile during a collision.

Cats in crates in veterinary hospitals are protected from harm from other animals and from doing harm to other animals or humans. However, the cat will still be stressed by the near presence of other cats and dogs and should be kept from viewing them by covering the crate with a towel. Harsh lighting should be avoided, and the crate kept off the floor by placing it securely on a table or other elevated surface.

Crates may be made of cardboard or plastic. Cat crates should have a top opening. Air holes should be present on at least 10% of the surface area of the crate. Absorbent bedding should be provided. Food and water should be considered, depending on the length of time to be in transport.

Inserting the Cat

Docile cats that have been previously acclimated to eating and resting in a crate should be given a chance to walk into a crate to seek seclusion and be offered a food treat. Putting a towel in may be an added lure, especially if the towel has been rubbed by the cat's owner, on a buddy cat, or on the cat to be crated itself.

Failing a voluntary entrance to the crate, the cat should be picked up and placed in transport crates through a top opening, rump first. After the cat stands in the crate, the handler's

hand should remain on the cat's neck and shoulders as the other hand closes the top against the handler's forearm. The restraining arm can then be slipped out of the crate and the top opening closed. If a top loading crate is not available, the front of a front opening crate can be tipped up. The cat is lowered, rump first, into the crate. After closing the crate door, the handler should gently set the crate in normal position.

Removing the Cat

Removal of the cat should be done in a closed room with all exits and hiding areas blocked. The top lid should be gradually opened while gaining control of the cat with one hand. If the cat is tractable, it can then be lifted out using both hands.

If the cat is agitated, it should be gently scruffed with one hand and its body supported with the other hand. If the cat is aggressive, a towel can be slid across the top door of the crate or between the top and bottom halves of a clamshell crate as a shield and visual barrier to the cat while the handler grasps the cat with the towel. Nets or gloves should be avoided, if possible.

The cat should be lifted out rather than allowing it to jump out on its own, and it should never be dumped out or scared out by thumping on the crate. If the crate does not have a top opening, the handler can turn the front door end up, or if it is a clamshell crate, the top half can be taken off of the carrier.

CAGES AND RUNS

Placement of Nonaggressive Cats in Cages

Cats should be placed in cages head first. The slip leash should be removed. One hand should have control of the cage door. Closure of the door should begin before release of the cat with the other hand so that when the restraint hand is removed there is insufficient room for the cat to escape.

Release should be as smooth and quiet as possible since this will be the most persistent memory of being last handled when the cat must be later removed from the cage. Struggling during the release will result in greater struggling when recapture is later needed. Control of the cat when placing it in the cage can be done with the restraint hand under its chest.

Removal of Nonaggressive Cats from Cages

The handler should approach the cage in a friendly manner speaking to the cat in a normal tone. Removal should begin with using one hand to open the cage door only enough to get the other hand and a slip leash in. Place the slip leash over the cat's head. After the cat's head is controlled, the cage door can be opened wider and the cat assisted by picking it up. First, gently lift the cat's neck by raising the slip leash so there is some control of the head before reaching under the cat's torso to lift it.

Trimming Nails

Before moving cats with claws, their nails should be trimmed.

Cat nails are sharp and curved for easy hooking penetration of the skin. They are dangerous in their ability to cause serious physical injury and potential for producing infected wounds. Cat Scratch Disease can be life-threatening in immunosuppressed people or children with immature immunity.

Trimming the nails every two to four weeks has been proposed as an alternative to onychectomy (declawing) by an experienced veterinary surgeon. If successful, trimming nails of a housecat may reduce damage to furniture, but attempting to trim some cats can put the handler at greater risk of clawing injury or infection. Trimming is required more often in cats than in dogs because only a small portion of the nail can be safely trimmed in cats compared to dogs.

If trimming nails is considered the best means to prevent scratch injuries, infections, and destruction of property, trimming can be attempted by one or two handlers. In either case, minimum restraint should be used. A cooperative cat can be held in the handler's lap with the handler's forearms blocking the cat's movements. One hand restrains a foot, with the index finger on a claw's digital pad while the thumb gently pushed the top of the nail to extrude it from the nail fold. The other hand uses a nail trimming instrument.

A second method is done with the cat on a table. The assistant handler holds the cat in sitting or standing restraint while the primary handler holds a foot, extrudes and trims the nails.

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

- Distraction techniques should be used on cats when they are carried in a handler's arms.
- Cat crates should have a front (vertical) door and a top (horizontal) door.
- Slip leashes should be used on all cats to be taken out of cages.
- Before carrying cats with claws, nails should be trimmed or capped.

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.