

Training Cats to Love Their Carriers

To those who are new to the concept of crate training, confinement in such a small space might seem like some sort of medieval torture. But free-roaming cats hide in small, dark spaces to avoid being eaten by coyotes and other predators. In fact, anyone who's visited a person with cats knows that when unfamiliar people enter their home, many cats immediately run for cover in places much smaller than a comfy travel carrier.

Based on this natural history, one can see how cats can easily be trained to perceive a travel carrier crate as a cozy cave or a home away from home. In fact, cats should be trained to enjoy being in a travel carrier or crate so they feel comfortable traveling.

Training cats to see their crate or carrier as their personal bedroom is simple even for cranky individuals, and usually takes less than a week. It's all about teaching them that great things happen when they're in their crate. The great thing we will use is food. Throughout the process, other motivators can be used, as well.

FIGURE A.



Depending on how much your cat dislikes the carrier, you may have to start by feeding her meals just outside of the carrier.

FIGURE B.



Once she is comfortably eating her meals outside of the carrier, place her food bowl just inside the door of her carrier.

FIGURE C.



Soon, she should readily stick her head inside the carrier to eat her food.

FIGURE D.



During the next few meals, gradually move her food bowl further into the carrier.



FIGURE E.



Only proceed further if your cat appears comfortable and confident when entering the carrier to access her meal. For most cats this should take fewer than 5 days. To help speed up the process, try hiding high value treats or toys in the carrier between meals.

FIGURE F.



Once your cat confidently enters all the way into the carrier when eating (and may even choose to hang out in there at other times!), practice closing the door during mealtimes.

FIGURE G.



Gradually start confining her for longer periods of time.

FIGURE H.



Once your cat is comfortable with longer periods of confinement, practice picking up the carrier, and perhaps even taking it out to the car – but make sure to provide LOTS of tasty treats or toys during this step!

Completing these simple steps will train your cat to think that her carrier is a heavenly haven!

*Note: Much of this information has been adapted from the work of Dr. Sophia Yin DVM. Dr. Yin was a pioneer in the field of animal behaviour and stress-free handling methods. She took her own life in 2014. Her tragic death was a wake-up call to the veterinary community and has resulted in greater awareness of stress and depression in the profession. We honour her memory by continuing her legacy of compassionate animal handling. For more information or other resources please visit <https://drsophiayin.com/>

