

# Feline Anti-Stress Protocol

Posted by Jennifer on March 10th, 2011

This insightful article gives a vet's point of view on how to reduce stress for cats that are being kept in a vet hospital boarding situation. However, the advice and experience Dr. Tripp shares can be helpful for many similar situations, such as cats in a shelter, rescue kennel, foster home with regular new cats coming through – and even for new cat adopters!

*This post is brought to Adopt-a-Pet.com by Dr. Rolan Tripp. Dr. Tripp received his doctorate from UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and also holds a bachelor's degree in music and a minor in philosophy. A regular guest on the Animal Planet Network, Dr. Tripp appears on both "Petsburgh, USA" and "Good Dog U."*

*Dr. Tripp writes...* As a species, the genetic makeup of cats make them more susceptible to hospitalized stress than dogs. The first factor is that unlike most animals, cats are equally a predator and a prey species. To a bird or mouse in the wild, the cat is a predator. However, to a coyote the same cat is a meal. One can imagine that a cat being veterinary restrained then injected might trigger the instinctive association of being pinned by a predator prior to a fatal skin puncture. More enlightened practitioners now use "Gentling Techniques" to educate, then "Distraction" to modify the cat's potentially negative association with veterinary care.

The second factor is that whereas dogs bond more to a social group, cats bond more to a home location. This is because canids typically roam over large areas to hunt, while a small felid is more likely to bond to and defend a specific hunting territory. A third factor is that the domestic cat's critical socialization period is so early (3-7 weeks) that cats are typically less socialized than dogs to many humans and environments. Finally, cats are more fastidious than dogs about their elimination. In most hospitalized situations, cats are not provided sufficient litter to bury their waste, and no one knows how much adds this to their stress.

## Clinical Feline Stress

<b>Clinical Feline Stress</b>	<b>Increasing</b>	<b>Decreasing</b>
<b>Grooming</b>	Lack of self grooming	Self grooming
<b>Appetite</b>	Anorexia	Eating
<b>Consciousness</b>	Staring with dilated pupils	Sleeping
<b>Posturing</b>	Freezing or Hiding	Approaching front of kennel
<b>Social Signal</b>	Aggressive threats	Seeking human attention

## Feline Inpatient Anti-Stress Protocol

- Provide a place to hide. Place a towel over the front of the kennel or put a brown paper grocery bag inside the kennel to give stressed cats a place to hide.

- Place a cardboard box in the cage. A cut box allows the cat to hide inside or jump on top since a cat's instinct when stressed is to climb. Even this slight elevation also helps the cat rest away from any litter odor or mess.
- Reduce exposure to urine and feces. Consider using litter on disposable cardboard trays that don't have any residual urine scent of other cats. Use one per elimination to keep the cage clean.
- Clean the food and water bowls. Wash daily instead of just adding to the existing bowls.
- Feed free choice. Unless contraindicated, provide dry food ad lib, and canned food twice daily. Offering a small amount of dry food makes it easier to record any consumption.
- Give a comfy bed. Provide a resting area with sides in addition to a litter box. If the cat rejects the cat bed and curls up in the litter box, provide a second clean litter box.
- "Feliway" olfaction ambiance (OTC feline facial pheromone). Mist a towel, wait 5 min for the alcohol solvent to evaporate, then place the towel as bedding inside the cage. Alternatively spray the top corner of an empty cage, and add the cat after the spray is dry. Repeat the spray daily as needed.
- Spend some extra time. Give a moment's attention to frightened non-aggressive cats, stroking and talking in a soothing voice. This is also helpful to induce eating in a stress anorexic cat. Avoid murmuring any "S" type words that might sound like hissing.
- Use the body language of love. Give the cat your own, "Lovey-eye" (eyes half closed, with slow blink) and look for reciprocation.
- Consider relocation. Move stressed cats away from dogs into a cat-only area. Alternatively, some cats might be more stressed by other cats, and do better mixed into the dog kennel area.
- Add medications. If the cat is very stressed and nonresponsive to other techniques, the DVM can administer anti-anxiety medication such as reversible sedation, benzodiazepine, and/or the sedative, Acepromazine.
- A "Pet Centered Practice" focuses on reducing both physical and emotional stress in hospitalized cats. This improves the client's satisfaction, the staff's competence, and the patient's mental and physical health.