

health & care **Natural Cat**

# Easy Rider

**Help reduce travel stress without drugs.**

“If you have any question that your kitty won’t make a trip pleasantly, visit an alternative practitioner or holistic veterinarian,” says Jack Wagner, DVM, of Panama City Beach, Fla., a veterinary specialist in traditional Chinese medicine, which includes acupuncture and herbs.

For longer journeys, a conventional veterinarian typically would prescribe the tranquilizers acepromazine or diazepam (Valium).

“However, you don’t need to sedate your cat,” Wagner says. “Holistic methods are safer and gentler and work with the system. Herbs, with acupuncture and acupressure, will calm animals and control anxiety.”

From the holistic perspective, medicating the problem only covers up the true issues. “The beauty of acupuncture, herbal medicine and homeopathics is that we get to the root of the problem, and the problem goes away,” Wagner says.

During the trip, look for holistic alternative remedies.

“Rescue Remedy works fantastically for calming, and it’s nontoxic,” says Wagner, who advises using half a dropper-full (diluted with water according to the directions) for an average-sized cat. Some flower essences contain alcohol, to which cats are highly sensitive, so it’s important to dilute them.

This flower-essence combo was designed to calm stress and alleviate trauma symptoms during crisis situations. To apply the flower essences, take a dropper and rub a drop or two of the diluted essence inside the ear leather (the inside flap) or on the pawpads. If your cat won’t let you do this, rub the diluted drops over your cat’s coat using your palms, or spray your hands and rub them on the coat.

“The only downside [is] it doesn’t last long, but if it’s a 15- or 20-minute trip, Rescue Remedy ought to get you there,” he says. When needed, you can pull over and re-apply the solution.

“Cats pick up on our emotions,” Wagner says. “If you get nervous, your kitty’s going to get nervous.” And cats’ senses are much sharper than ours, picking up on things such as engine clatter and construction smells.



You must stay calm yourself and provide soothing surroundings. Play classical music, speak calmly and avoid loud or busy areas.

Other balming alternatives, such as herb-stuffed collars or homeopathic remedies, might help, too. If you plan to use herbs, supplements or natural remedies, consult with an experienced holistic veterinarian first.

“Think of herbs and homeopathic remedies as medicine with possibly unforeseen effects,” Wagner says. “For example, chamomile has a very calming influence on animals, but when taken long enough, it has the opposite effect.” Chamomile also has been linked to bleeding problems in cats.

One option is a diffuser or spray that contains calming cat pheromones (chemical signals), which are naturally derived, but still mask the cat’s underlying health issues. “There’s no real reason not to use pheromones,” Wagner says. “But how well they work depends on why the cat is anxious to begin with. Why can’t it handle the trip? I would rather cure the problem.”

A big issue for many cats is the carrier. Don’t suddenly cram your cat in and expect it to be overjoyed. Instead, gradually accustom your cat well beforehand.

“Teach [your cat that] not every trip involves somebody sticking in a needle,” Wagner says.

Before the trip, be sure your cat has the best foundations for health to further reduce stress. Feed a high-quality, natural, meat-based diet and provide a calm, enriching home environment. Finally, arrange for a physical exam and a blood test to rule out medical issues that might affect your cat’s disposition and ability to travel well. ○

*Lisa Hanks is a freelance writer based in Newport Beach, Calif. As she writes each day, her three cats rotate lap duties to be sure she is never catless.*



BY LISA A. HANKS

