# CAT FRIENDLY CLINIC

## Cat friendly veterinary care: a guide for cat carers

**Taking your cat to the veterinary clinic can be stressful for both you and your cat. However, clinics that are accredited as 'Cat Friendly Clinics' go to extra lengths to improve the veterinary experience for your cat.**

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international cat care

# Introduction

International Cat Care, and its veterinary division the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM), have long recognised that cats are very different to dogs in their health and behaviour. Cats are most comfortable in their own home and find the veterinary clinic environment – with all its unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells – potentially very stressful.

You can find out more, and search for a Cat Friendly Clinic or Practice in your area, by visiting:

Cat Friendly Clinic
catfriendlyclinic.org

Cat Friendly Practice
By the American Association of Feline Practitioners
catfriendly.com

The Cat Friendly Clinic programme was established in 2012 by ISFM, initially in the UK and widening to Europe, Australasia, Asia and other countries, to help veterinary teams adapt the clinic environment and the way they interact with their feline patients to reduce cats' stress and, in turn, benefit their mental wellbeing and physical health. The programme was launched at the same time in North America, South America and the Caribbean by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) as the Cat Friendly Practice Program. This global initiative has grown enormously as veterinary staff have discovered that understanding cats means happier cats and carers and, in turn, greater job satisfaction for the veterinary team.

This guide will discuss what makes a veterinary clinic 'cat friendly' and why this is so important.

## Why do we need Cat Friendly Clinics?

To understand why cats find visiting the veterinary clinic stressful, we need to understand where they originated from, as this affects how they see the world. Cats retain many 'wild' characteristics from their ancestors; they are territorial (meaning they do not like to leave their home area), independent, and sensitive to new sights, sounds and smells (Figure 1). They are also naturally frightened of other species such as dogs (even if they live with one), particularly when they cannot easily run away.

## What is a Cat Friendly Clinic?

Veterinary clinics can become accredited as Cat Friendly Clinics by meeting various criteria relating to the clinic environment and the way the veterinary team interact with cats. Cat Friendly Clinics implement these cat friendly standards to provide a calm environment for cats. Clinics provide evidence of any changes they have made in order to meet these criteria, assessed by ISFM (or AAFP in the regions it covers).

### The clinic environment

Each area of the clinic can be adapted to make it better for cats.

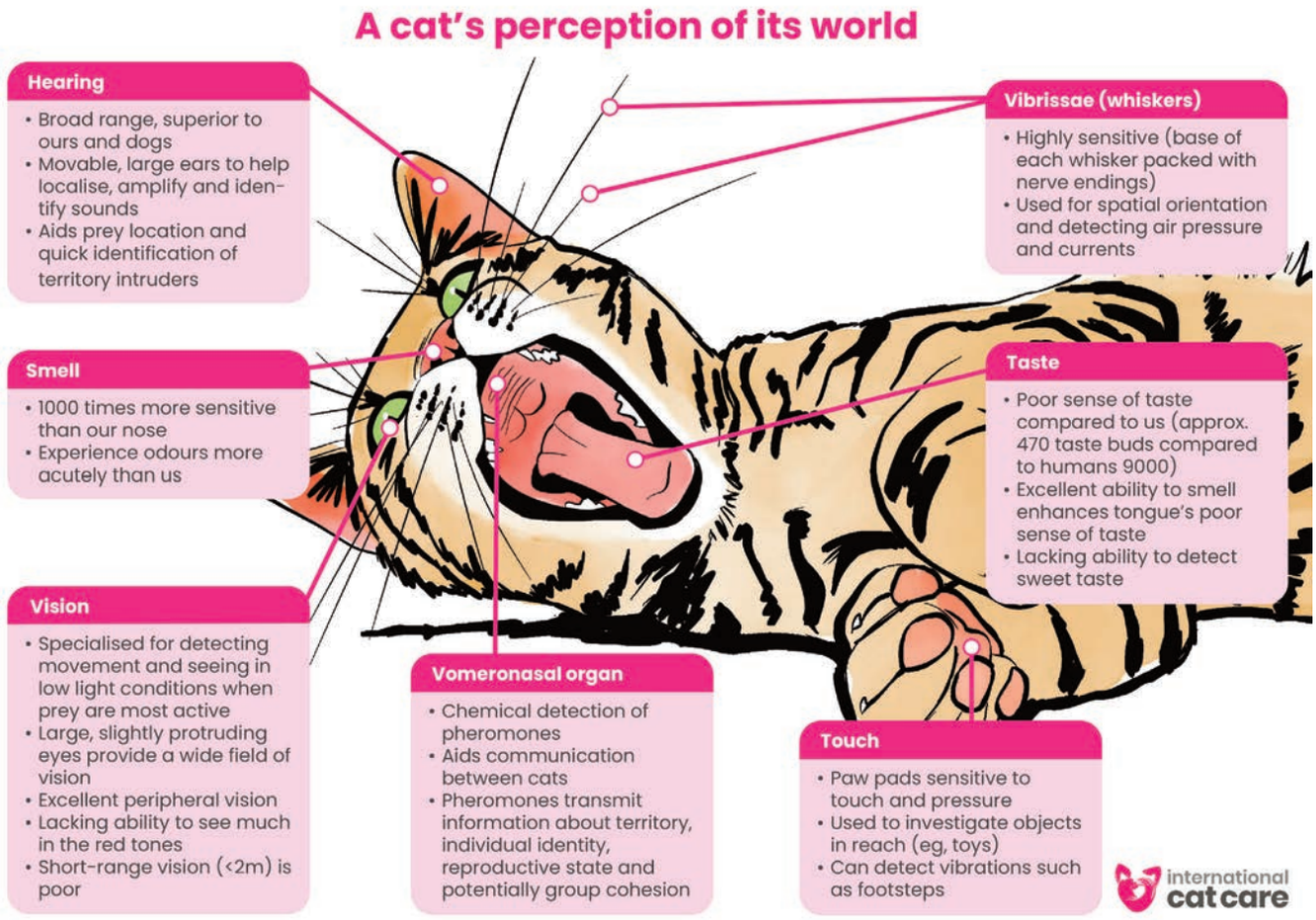


*Figure 1: Cats have excellent senses of smell, sight, sound, touch and taste. This makes them clever little hunters, but can mean the veterinary environment is overwhelming and scary.* Source: International Cat Care

For example, clinics may offer:
• Cat-only appointment times, or the option to wait in a temperature-controlled car;
• A waiting room with separate areas for cats and their carers away from dogs, with shelves to place cat carriers on (cats feel safer off the floor);
• Cat-only consultation/examination rooms (Figure 2), free of dog smells;
• A hospital ward providing a safe, warm, quiet and calm area for sick and recovering cats, which ideally is also a cat-only facility (Figure 3).

Other areas of the clinic are also adjusted with cats in mind.

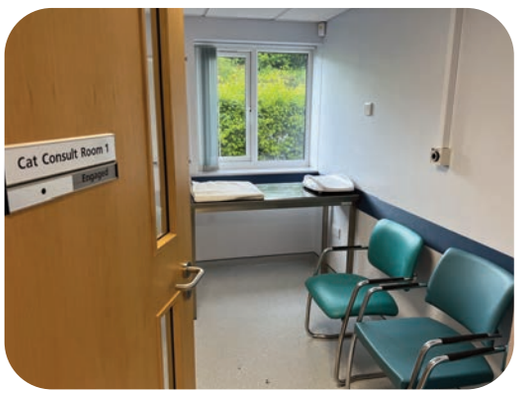


*Figure 2: Cats and dogs should be kept as separate as possible. For example, the veterinary clinic may have consultation/examination rooms that are for cats only, or might schedule appointments in cat-only sessions.* Source: Lumbry Park Veterinary Specialists, UK

*Figure 3: A hospital cage can be designed and furnished to make cats feel comfortable. This kitten has a soft bed in which to hide and feel safe.* Source: Sam Taylor

## Equipment

Becoming a Cat Friendly Clinic does not require a lot of special equipment. Small, simple changes can easily be made that make a big difference to the cats. Examples are the use of quiet clippers and smaller needle sizes.

## Handling and examining cats

Staff in Cat Friendly Clinics should always handle cats gently and kindly, watching their behaviour and considering what emotions the cat may be feeling. Cats should never be held down to keep them still for procedures or grasped or lifted by the 'scruff' (skin on the back of the neck; Figure 4), as this will cause fear and pain, and lead to the cat developing negative associations with the clinic. Veterinary professionals at Cat Friendly Clinics have learnt to change the way they touch and hold their patients, to ensure the cat is comfortable (Figures 5 and 6).

*Figure 4: In Cat Friendly Clinics, cats are handled gently and calmly.* Source: International Cat Care

## Veterinary team training

Veterinary professionals in Cat Friendly Clinics are well trained and stay up to date with the latest information on the veterinary care of cats through their membership of ISFM or AAFP. They enjoy learning more about how to care for cats in their clinic, and attend lectures and conferences, sharing that knowledge with the rest of the veterinary team.

*Figure 5: Examining a cat in the bottom of their carrier after removing the top means they can feel safe and secure. They can also be allowed to hide under a blanket if they choose.* Source: Kelly St Denis

*Figure 6: Cats like treats too! Liquid or other types of treats can be offered while the cat is examined, to make the experience more positive.* Source: Sam Taylor

## Are there different types of cat friendly accreditation?

Veterinary clinics can apply for different levels of accreditation depending on their facilities, with Cat Friendly Clinics at all levels (bronze, silver and gold) doing a great job caring for cats. Table 1 shows some of the criteria involved in each level.

## How do I find a Cat Friendly Clinic?

You can find a Cat Friendly Clinic near you by visiting catfriendlyclinic.org (covering the UK, Europe, Australasia, Asia and other countries outside of North America, South America and the Caribbean) and a Cat Friendly Practice at catfriendly.com (covering North America, South America and the Caribbean). Your veterinary clinic may already be accredited and, if so, should be displaying their certificate proudly in the waiting area. If they are not already part of the programme, then perhaps suggest they consider applying, and direct them to the above websites for information. Almost any veterinary clinic can become cat friendly with simple, inexpensive changes and a determination to help improve the care of cats in their care.

**Table 1** Some features of different levels of Cat Friendly Clinic accreditation

| Area of the clinic | Bronze | Silver* | Gold* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Waiting room | Cat-only appointment times if there is no separate area for cats to wait, and there must be facilities for carriers to be kept off the floor | Must have separate waiting area for cats, blankets to cover carriers and facilities for carriers to be kept off the floor | |
| Hospitalisation facilities | Not necessarily required | Dogs and cats must be separated in the ward, with cages meeting or exceeding minimum cage sizes | Must have separate cat-only ward and larger cage sizes |
| Consultations | Safe, secure and well-equipped consultation/ examination room. Minimum of 10-minute consultation times; longer for sick, ageing or anxious cats, behavioural consultations and complex cases | | Dedicated cat consultation/examination room. Minimum of 15-minute consultation times; longer for sick, ageing or anxious cats, behavioural consultations and complex cases |
| Operations | Surgical facilities not required on the premises | Must have facilities to anaesthetise cats, if needed | Must have a separate dedicated operating theatre |
| Equipment | Good level of cat friendly equipment required | Additional equipment (eg, dental treatment equipment) required | Higher level of equipment (eg, laboratory equipment) required |

*Higher levels must meet requirements for lower levels, plus offer extra features, as described in the table

## Support our work

Our Cat Carer Guides, provided to inform and advise cat owners and caregivers alike, are carefully created by the International Cat Care team; all in the hopes that we can promote more awareness and spread the word about 'cat friendly' treatments for cats.

We all want the best for our cats, and we hope that you find this free guide useful. If you would like to show your gratitude, a donation would be greatly appreciated. Every gift goes to support our work towards a world in which each cat's life experience will be as good as it can be.

To find out more, or to make a donation, please go to:
**icatcare.org/support-us/donate**

**Thank you from all of us at International Cat Care and on behalf of cats**

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