

***Ask the Vet:* Tips for traveling with and without pets**

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For many, the holiday season brings opportunities for travel. Each situation is a little different, but for those planning to travel with or without their pets, the following tips are intended to offer an ounce of prevention.

Whether traveling by car or by air, securing your pet in a carrier close to your reach can be reassuring for both of you. In the car, a carrier can be secured with a seat belt or packed between other stable luggage to prevent tipping on corners or at stops. Use of a special pet harness which is designed to be attached to the car's seatbelt is effective for many. These methods of secure travel are especially important in case of an accident. Pets have been lost as a result of their fearful running away from an accident scene or injured from physical trauma caused by the accident itself.

Medication to help calm and reduce anxiety should be avoided when possible. Planning for travel in advance with plenty of time for gentle training and acclimation to riding in the car usually eliminates the need for anti-anxiety medication. Some adventurous pets simply love to travel. Most pets settle in after a short time for the task of traveling when they are in the company of relaxed family members with whom they share a strong bond. For those personalities whose energy level rises with every twist, turn, and new sight or sound, anti-anxiety medication may be helpful. Preparation for use of medication should be discussed with your veterinarian well in advance of your trip. Adjustments in either medication choice or dose may be needed based on trial results so that a predictable effect can be expected at the time of travel. Behavior modifying drugs do not have the same effect in every individual. The last problem a pet and his family needs is to be traveling through unfamiliar territory when the pet has an adverse reaction to a medication.

When using a carrier, a great trick is to place several layers of disposable piddle pads on the bottom so that if an accident occurs, the top layer can be easily removed leaving a fresh layer already in place. Be sure to take several plastic baggies for neat disposal of soiled pads.

Very light feeding prior to and during travel with emphasis on water access to maintain hydration is best to avert an upset belly. Pack a container of familiar water from home so that small amounts can be offered. Plastic sealable food containers make this simple.

Discuss the current diet and any medication that your pet is taking with your veterinarian to make sure that you have enough and that you understand any changes that might be needed during the time of your trip. Also, discuss flea, tick, and intestinal parasite prevention needs so that your pet will be protected at your destination. Fleas or other parasites make a horrible parting gift regardless of whether your visit is to the warm south or to a local relative's farm where the resident pets have no effective flea control in place.

Make sure that your pet's harness or collar or both are fitted well with a securely attached leash to minimize the risk of your pet slipping out if he makes a dash from an unexpected scary sight or sound. Attach tags clearly bearing your name and contact information to your pet's harness, collar, and carrier.

Make sure you have your family veterinarian's phone and email contact in case you encounter a need for advice.

Air travel regulations differ broadly, so be sure to research airline and destination requirements for veterinary health certificates, vaccinations, and disease testing in advance so that you can pack copies of necessary proof.

People chew on gum or nibble on a snack to help regulate their ear pressure during flights. Offering a chewing treat or a food stuffed interactive toy like a Kong that takes a while to empty can be helpful during air travel to help your pet adjust to pressure changes.

When you travel without your pet, be sure that you entrust his care to people who will follow your instructions. Being separated from one's family is stressful for many pets. Stress can result in diarrhea, lack of appetite, or, more seriously, pancreatitis. Strictly offering a pet his regular diet and feeding a bit less rather than more than usual is a safe plan. People foods and fatty foods should be avoided as they are associated with GI upset. Trying to maintain a pet's daily routine is also helpful.

Be sure to let both your veterinarian and your pet's care taker know your wishes clearly in case your pet is sick during your absence. How would you like your veterinarian to proceed with care if you cannot be contacted?

If your pet is spending a significant amount of time alone at home, then use timers to turn on/off calming music. Many people use automatic feeders to release interactive toys or small meals periodically. Practice with this sort of device prior to your absence to make sure it works as you expect. If your pet likes to watch the birds through the window, be sure that the feeder will be filled as needed.

Whether your pet is traveling with you, lodging with friends, or staying at your home, plan to expect the unexpected and try to be well prepared. Plan well in advance and think through each stage of your trip to make your travel as predictable and safe as possible for you and your dependent pet. It is certainly nice to have the tools to solve a problem if one is encountered especially when you are away from home.