

***Ask the Vet:* Tips for Traveling with Pets**

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With schools winding down and weather more conducive to outdoor adventures finally now on its way, the summer travel season is upon us. For those planning to travel with, or without, their pets the following tips are intended to help make the experience more enjoyable for all.

In the car, securing your pet in a carrier close to your reach can be reassuring for both of you. A well ventilated carrier can be secured with seatbelt attachments to help prevent tipping at corners or stops. If not using a carrier some find that a special pet harness designed to attach to the car's seatbelt can increase pet safety.

When using a carrier for air or car travel, 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 clean layer already in place. Be sure to take several plastic bags for neat disposal of soiled pads.

Take extra precautions to prevent your pet from running away in an unfamiliar place. Unfortunately just this spring, I spoke with a family traveling across the country, and during their overnight stay in Ashland their beloved cat escaped. Make sure that your pet's harness or collar are fitted well with a securely attached leash to minimize the risk of your pet slipping out if they make a dash from an unexpected scary sight or sound.

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.

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. Most pets settle in after a short time when in the company of relaxed family members. The presence of a favorite blanket or toys may be very helpful.

For those personalities whose energy level rises with every twist, turn, new sight or sound, anti-anxiety medication can be a necessity. Preparation for use of medication should be discussed with your veterinarian well in advance. 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. For pets that have a problem with motion sickness, medication is available that may be beneficial.

Discuss with your veterinarian the current diet and any other medications your pet is taking to make sure you have enough and that you understand any changes that might be needed throughout your trip. Make sure you have your veterinarian's contact information with you in case you encounter a need for advice.

Make sure you also discuss flea, tick, and intestinal parasite prevention needs so that your pet will be protected. 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 when the resident pets have no effective flea control in place.

If you are traveling by air, research the airline and destination requirements as regulations differ broadly. Know in advance what specific veterinary health certificates and vaccination proof is needed, and pack copies of the necessary documents. Remember, even a brief drive across the Canadian border requires documented proof of a rabies vaccination.

For those traveling without your pets, be sure you entrust their care to people who will follow your instructions. Being separated from one's family is stressful for many pets. Stress can result in diarrhea or lack of appetite, so strictly offering a pet their regular diet and feeding a bit less rather than more than usual is a safe plan. Trying to maintain a pet's daily routine is also helpful.

If your pet is spending a significant amount of time alone at home, then you can use timers to turn on/off calming music. Many people also use automatic feeders to release interactive toys or small meals periodically. Make sure you practice with this sort of device to make sure it works as you expect.

Be sure to let both your pet's caretaker and your veterinarian 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?

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.