

Rampant Vet Visits

A few preventive measures can make visits to the veterinarian more pleasant for everyone.

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Q. Our cat Pippin had what could only be described as a deprived kittenhood. His mother and all but one littermate died when he was less than 3 weeks old. We adopted Pippin at about 3½ weeks of age and brought him home to live with our 2-year-old cat, Spenser. During his first few months with us, Pippin made many trips to the vet to be treated for worms, ear mites, a staph infection and an upper respiratory infection, in addition to the usual exams and shots. He was neutered and is now an indoor-only cat.

Only two adults and two cats live in our household. Pippin is warm and affectionate with us, however, our other cat, is not very social with strangers, and even with us he isn't particularly fond of being handled beyond a certain tolerance. Usually, he uses body language to express his displeasures, but will occasionally scratch if pushed beyond his limits.

We recently took Pippin to the vet for his annual checkup and had an experience like I've never seen before. About 30 seconds into the exam, Pippin went into a tirade that I'd compare to a Tasmanian devil hissing, snarling, scratching and biting. By wrapping him in a towel, the doctor and his technician were able to give him his shots but couldn't complete a proper examination.

We've had 25 years experience in raising cats and all have been happy and well-adjusted. We have used the same veterinarians for more than 16 years and trust them completely. I'm looking for advice on what I can do during the next year to increase Pippin's tolerance to strangers and being handled, so that he can have a proper veterinary exam.

A. Your scenario is unfortunate, yet not all that uncommon. Many cats that are purrfectly fine at home turn into unrecognizable terrors at the veterinary office. We have to look into the factors of such reactions, yet I cannot solve your problem with one or two simple suggestions. However, I found that spraying a feline pheromone product on my hands before attempting to handle such panic-stricken cats will often work wonders. You might try acclimating your kitty to strangers by using this product.

Talk to your veterinarian before your scheduled appointment to make certain that you don't have to wait for a long period of time before being seen. Many cats get wound up by the sounds and smells of other cats and dogs. Also, having a veterinarian that is confident with cats and confident in handling such feline personalities is a real bonus.