

## How Can I Help My Nervous Cat?

**CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, advises on ways to help a stressed-out cat stay calm enough for vet visits and pet sitters.**

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**Q:** I have a cat who I rescued from a shelter in Rhode Island when he was roughly 5 months old. He is 2 now and very nervous when people he doesn't know come over. He runs and hides. My friends keep saying something must have happened to him at the shelter where I rescued him because it is very unusual for a cat to be that nervous with people. I'm starting to think they maybe right. When he is alone with me, he is totally fine. It's just when someone comes over to my house that he runs and hides and often waits until they leave before he comes out again.

Last year, I went on a trip and brought my cat to be boarded for five days. From the moment I put him in the carrying case, he started to moan, growl and make all kinds of noise. When I picked him up, he was just as bad as when I drove him there.

The next time I went away, it was for five days again and (I decided) to leave him home (with plenty of food and water) and see what happened. I came home and he was fine. I have done this twice now and he seems to be fine when I return. Unfortunately, I don't have anyone in the area that I trust enough to check up on him. My problem is that I am going on another trip for eight days this time. Is that too long for a cat to be by himself?

**A:** As a cat practitioner, I have encountered many cats that get extremely stressed out when they visit the veterinary office, whether for a routine veterinary visit or for boarding. Cats do require regular veterinary visits, for preventive care such as vaccinations, dental procedures and wellness blood work. And, of course, they require veterinary visits when they are sick. For cats that get super-stressed, speak to your vet about the possibility of you administering a tranquilizer before the veterinary visit. There is also a product, Feliway, that is a synthetic pheromone. When sprayed in a cat carrier (or on a towel that is in the carrier), it can have a calming effect on the cat. If your cat is sick and needs to see a vet, there is no way around bringing the cat to the vet (the cat shouldn't be tranquilized when sick, as it may mask the symptoms of the illness). For routine procedures, like vaccinations, you might consider a vet who makes house calls.

As for boarding, it does seem like your cat simply gets too stressed in this situation. Clearly, your alternative is to keep your cat at home; however, I think that five days is a bit too long to leave the cat completely unattended, and eight days is certainly too long. Check the Yellow Pages or the Internet for professional pet sitters. Ask your veterinarian – I'm sure they have a list of two or three that they can recommend. Granted, your cat is 2 years old and is healthy, and the odds are that he won't get sick while you're gone. If, however, he became ill on day two of your five-day trip, he could be in pretty bad shape by the time you came back. By day eight, who knows what you might find? Your cat is a male, and if he were to develop a urinary blockage while you were out of town (a common malady in male cats), you would likely come home to a dead cat. The odds are small, but it is not worth the risk. A weekend unattended is probably fine, but a five- or eight-day trip is too long.