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FEAR FREE MEDICINE AT ALTITUDE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

What is Fear Free? Practicing Fear Free medicine is a way of taking the stress and anxiety out of veterinary visits for your furry companions as well as yourself. The #1 reason people do not bring their pets to a veterinarian on a regular basis is due to the stress and anxiety that their pets encounter at the visit. This is where Fear Free medicine comes into practice! By minimizing the amount of stress and anxiety that your pet, as well as yourself, faces at a veterinary practice we in turn can provide better medicine and help keep your pet happy and healthy. At the clinic there are several things we as trained professionals can do to help relax your pet including the use of anxiety lowering medications; however, the majority of the difference for a Fear Free visit can be accomplished prior to a visit with you!

Why practicing Fear Free medicine is recommended:

- Less stress for your pet, yourself, and the team at Altitude Veterinary Hospital
- Less accidents - minimizing stress and anxiety leads to less bites and scratches for everyone involved!
- Preserving the human-animal bond. If pets are calmer at the veterinarians, this can lead to a better relationship between you and your pet as you are not seen as the “bad-guy” in their eyes by bringing them in for necessary care and causing stress.
- Better medicine can be provided! When pets are calmer at a veterinary hospital, then a more thorough examination can be completed as well as obtaining recommend/necessary diagnostics (bloodwork, imaging, etc.).

How to prep for a Fear Free Visit!

Antianxiety Pheromones: Adaptil (for dogs) and Feliway (for cats) is a pheromone (odorless chemical) that mothers produce that have calming effects on their young, and luckily for us also adult pets. These pheromones can be bought as a spray, collar, or room diffuser. They can be helpful when making a car ride or the carrier a less stressful of a situation. Adding a pheromone such as Adaptil or Feliway can make a Fear Free visit more attainable! We often use these pheromones here in our hospital, but it would make a larger impact for your pet if this is something you can start instituting at home as well as the car ride here!

Crate Training for Cats: A lot of our feline friends run as soon as they see their carrier pulled out and at this point, we have already loss at accomplishing a Fear Free visit. Try pulling out the carrier days to weeks earlier depending on how anxious your cat gets. You can train your cat to love the carrier by first feeding them near it, feeding them in it (try playing with the lid on and off), some cats are more motivated with play so you can substitute feeding for play time near and in the carrier. Some cats learn to love their carrier so much they will voluntarily lounge in it if it is left out for them. They learn that the carrier is their little home and is a haven.

Educating the team at Altitude: If your pet has known triggers such as males, white coats, masks, etc. please let us know prior to your visit so we can take the proper precautions. We can also make sure to get your pet in a room right away if they are very anxious waiting in the lobby. Communication between you (who knows your pet best) and our team is the best way to help facilitate a Fear Free visit!

Treats, Treats, and More Treats: Part of practicing Fear Free Medicine is making the visit happy by any means possible – and this often means lots of treats! Bringing your pet hungry can often increase the value of the treats we give in hospital. We usually give lots of peanut butter (let us know if you or someone in the house is allergic) and squeeze cheese! If there is a treat your pet truly loves, please bring them in as well. If your pet is not very food motivated you can try bringing in their favorite toy instead.

Victory Visits: Some dogs and cats are known to be very nervous when they come to a veterinary practice and what better way to help them out than with non-stressful visits called “Victory Visits”. These visits are usually best tolerated and successful if you work up from very low stressful visits to then increasing the stress triggers. You do not move up on the ladder until your pet seems comfortable with the first step. Below is an example of a Victory Visit plan you can follow depending on how anxious your dog is you can choose to start at different levels. Remember to bring lots of treats to encourage a happy visit and do not feed as much at breakfast so your pet is really motivated for their treat rewards.

1. Drive to the clinic and park in the parking lot for several minutes.
2. Walk your pet around the parking lot – make sure they have a properly fitting collar!
3. Enter the main lobby and sit for a couple minutes before leaving (ask the receptionist to give your pet a treat!)
4. Enter the main lobby and try working with your pet on getting a weight.
5. Ask the front staff for a Victory Visit walk through (a technician or assistant can interact with your pet with lots of treats and walk them in our treatment area if time allows).

Doing all of this will make regular visits to the veterinarian so much more relaxing for both you and your furry companion!

Prescribed Antianxiety Medications: If your pet is still rather nervous even though you have tried your best to provide a calm environment then there are medications that we can prescribe to help with anxiety and stress for veterinary visits or if needed for other aspects of their life. Gabapentin and Trazadone (for cats and dogs respectively) are the medications that we reach for to help reduce fear, anxiety, and stress medically. These medications are best if a dose is given the night before, and then the morning of the appointment. It is most effective if you can schedule your appointment around 2 hours after giving the morning dose (our front staff would be happy to help you with this). Let us know if you are interested in Gabapentin or Trazadone for your pet!

For more information and educational resources please check out Fear Free's website at <https://fearfreepets.com/>.