

Preparing your cat for blood donation handling

As part of the donation process, your cat will be handled by our donation team. This training sheet is designed to help your cat become more familiar and comfortable with these experiences before their appointment.

Some cats may feel unsure during their first visit because the environment, sounds, and handling are unfamiliar. Practising these exercises ahead of time helps build positive associations, allowing the donation process to feel safer and more predictable for your cat.



Cats learn best when they feel safe and have choice and control during the process.

Training tips

Keep sessions short and positive

Practice daily if possible

Progress gradually in small steps

Allow your cat to remain in their chosen position whenever possible

Never force handling or restrain your cat for training

Watch your cat's body language and pause if they show signs of stress

Creating a comfortable training station

A training station is a designated area where your cat can feel safe and relaxed during handling or training exercises. Unlike a simple resting spot, it is used to create positive experiences with gentle care routines. Over time, your cat learns that this area predicts safety, rewards, and choice, helping reduce stress during vet visits and blood donation appointments.

Choose a stable, non-slip, comfortable surface in a quiet area with minimal distractions. Many cats prefer an elevated station, such as a couch, bench, cat tree platform, or sturdy table. A towel, bathmat, dish-drying mat, or similar surface can provide consistency and comfort.

Encourage your cat to visit the station voluntarily by offering treats there 2-3 times daily, by guiding them to the station using treats in your hand or a small treat trail. Once your cat is on the station, feed 5-10 treats directly on the mat or from your hand, then place a treat off the mat. If your cat chooses to return, repeat 1-2 times.

Continue rewarding your cat with treats, play, brushing, affection, or other rewards while they are on the station. Allow them to move away and return freely so they feel in control. Short, positive sessions help build a sense of safety and predictability.

A key goal is helping your cat to become comfortable while remaining settled in one place for short periods. During donation, your cat will need to stay relatively still while being gently supported by the donation team, so practising this behaviour at home helps prepare them.

Reward your cat for calmly resting on the station while you gently touch different areas of their body. Start with a few seconds and gradually increase the duration. The goal is not perfect stillness, but helping your cat feel safe remaining in place.

Long-lasting rewards, such as lickable treats on a lick mat, squeeze treats, or small treat pieces, can help your cat stay relaxed and engaged. Rewards may initially be given every 1-3 seconds, then gradually reduced to every 5-10 seconds or longer as your cat becomes more comfortable.

As your cat progresses, gradually increase handling while continuing to pair it with rewards. Watch their body language closely and, if they become uncomfortable, return to a step they were comfortable with. Practising in different calm environments can also help generalise comfort.

Helpful tips

- Use a consistent towel, blanket, or mat during training
- Reward calm stationary behaviour frequently
- Pair gentle touch with relaxation and rewards
- Keep sessions short and successful
- Use long-lasting rewards such as lickable treats or frequent small treats
- Begin with a high rate of reward and gradually decrease
- Allow your cat to move away and return by choice
- Practise in different calm environments over time



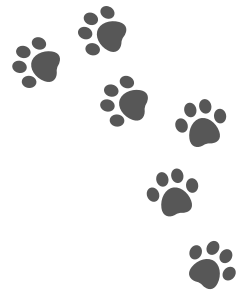
Gentle shoulder, chest, and leg handling

During donation, our team will gently support your cat around the shoulders and chest, along with holding a leg for blood sample collection. Practising this ahead of time helps your cat become more comfortable with having hands rest on their body.

Approach from the side rather than above. Allow your cat to sit or lie in their preferred position. Gently place your hands on the shoulders, with fingers resting softly on the chest and thumbs near the shoulders or between the shoulder blades or slowly move one hand to reach behind one of your cat's forelegs. Hold for 5-10 seconds, reward, then release. Gradually increase duration as your cat becomes more comfortable.

Helpful tips

- Keep pressure minimal and supportive, not restrictive
- Pair handling with high-value rewards
- Practise brief repetitions throughout the day
- Stop before your cat becomes uncomfortable



Gentle head lift and neck handling

During the donation, a member of our team will gently support and slightly lift your cat's head to access the vein. Practising this at home can make the experience more familiar and less stressful for your cat. While your cat is relaxed, approach from the side and place one hand on each side of the neck. Thumbs rest on the shoulders, with fingers supporting under the outsides of the chin. Gently lift the head slightly upward for 1–2 seconds, reward, then release.

Your cat should remain in a comfortable position (sitting or standing). Gradually increase duration and pair with gentle touching around the neck. Movements should stay slow, gentle, and minimal.

If your cat shows signs of stress, such as pulling away, becoming tense, ears going back, trying to leave, or refusing treats, pause and end the session on a positive note. At the next session, start with the last comfortable step.

Helpful tips

- Avoid gripping tightly or forcing the head
- Pair handling with rewards
- Keep repetitions brief and calm
- Watch body language and adjust as needed
- Practise during naturally relaxed moments



Towel practice

Towels are often used during vet care to provide comfort, stability, and gentle support. Introducing towels positively at home can help your cat feel more relaxed during their appointment.

Start by placing a towel near your cat during treats, play, or rest. Once comfortable, gently drape part of the towel over their back or side for a second or two, then remove and reward. Gradually increase duration and contact over time. The towel should always predict comfort and positive experiences, not restraint.

Helpful tips

- Allow your cat to move away if desired
- Keep movements slow and gentle
- Pair towel handling with treats or calm petting
- Pair placing the towel loosely (not over the head) with shoulder and chest handling exercises



Clipper sound and vibration practise

Most donors will have a small area of fur shaved on their leg and neck. The sound and vibration of clippers can feel unfamiliar, so gradual introduction helps reduce stress.

Begin by turning the clippers on across the room while offering treats or another positive activity. As your cat becomes comfortable, slowly decrease the distance between your cat and the clippers. If you don't have clippers, an electric toothbrush handle or a hair clipper joke app on your phone can be used to simulate this sound and vibration.

When relaxed, hold the clippers near your cat without touching. Eventually, gently touch the back of the clippers (without shaving) to the shoulders or neck for one second, reward immediately, and gradually increase duration.

Helpful tips

- Keep sessions very short and positive
- Use multiple short sessions
- Move further away if your cat becomes worried



During donation appointments, your cat will be handled gently by our trained team using the least restraint necessary for safety and comfort. Your cat's welfare is monitored closely throughout the process and if they show any signs of stress or discomfort, we will pause or stop the session.

Thank you for helping to prepare your cat for being a blood donor! Your effort helps create a more positive experience for your cat while supporting and helping to save the lives of other cats in need.