



Nanette Walker Smith, MEd, RVT, CVT, LVT
Fear FreeSM Certified Professional
n_w_smith_24@outlook.com * 719-464-7466



Fear FreeSM Pre-Visit & In-Clinic Sedation Therapies

or

Taking the 'pet' out of 'petrified'

Both dogs and cats react to their humans' emotional state and respond accordingly for better or worse due to their innate and developed abilities. The more unsettled and nervous the human is, the more likely their dog or cat will be unnerved as well. On the other paw, a relaxed person with a 'no worries' attitude is likely to positively impact their pet, or at the very least, they're less likely to escalate the tension their animal's experiences. The two greatest reasons that prevent people from taking their pet into the vet are the perceived stress of the visit to the pet and the stress they feel bringing the pet in. People may feel they're doing emotional harm or betraying their pet's trust by bringing them in. One of the best ways to keep the pet owner in a more relaxed state is calming any lingering fear they may have over how their pet will respond to the visit.

Taking the 'pet out of petrified' includes measures taken to keep the pet owner calm, starting from their own living room, to the trip to the practice, to the exam room, and back home again. Obviously our first choice is to minimize use of medications. We'll discuss more of the tips and tricks in detail in our Incorporating Fear FreeSM into Veterinary Practice including considerate approach and gentle control as Fear FreeSM is most definitely not all about the 'drugs!'

I want to highlight the features to consider and evaluate as we determine how to make a pet's visit as happy as possible.

1. **Emotional Medical Record (EMR):** Regular behavior monitoring incorporated into wellness checks and office visits keeps communication about the animal's behavior open to address issues early and often. You can track improvements, changes, and responses to care easily with this and adjust accordingly. Just because a procedure works perfect one time, may not work as well the next.
2. **Victory Visits to positively reinforce the pet owner in the vet hospital**
 - a. Mini visits to the hospital between regular care for treats, toys, and enjoyable interaction helps prepare dogs and cats and their owners for future visits.
 - b. Owners experience positive reinforcement if they perceive their pet enjoys coming in, or, at the very least, is comfortable.
 - c. Calmz[®] Anxiety Relief System is an acupressure system that Dr. Lisa Radosta, DACVB uses in her Florida behavior practice. For the pet owner that wants to avoid medications and/or the pet that is not at the FAS level of 4 or 5 this could be all that's needed to work with the body's natural functions to decrease FAS. (<https://calmz.com>)
 - A comfortable, adjustable vest places the Calmz[®] device over specific acupressure points on a dog's spine. Using NeuroSync™ Technology, the device creates and delivers calming frequencies that only the dog can hear and feel.
 - Several behavior specialists report this has allowed significant reductions in negative behavior associated with common anxiety triggers.
 - d. Sleepypod[®] (<http://sleepypod.com/clickit-sport>) is a company that creates pet safety harnesses, beds and carriers, and travel carriers of all types and sizes. Not only is this a smart safety feature – pets should NEVER be in a car without restraint. (Remember the driver's education videos or birthing videos that feature what a baby or toddler is like airborne in an auto accident without having been restrained in a car seat?)



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- Crash tested
 - Converts from pet bed to mesh covered carrier that seat belts in to the car for a safe journey
- 3. Empathy for the owner**
- a. ALWAYS take time to listen to the owner's concerns. Let them be heard and understood by asking open-ended questions and listen without interruption.
 - b. Take the time to summarize and repeat back their concern in your own words helps the person feel understood.
 - c. Be cognizant of issues that are mentioned or may be alluded to which may be important to the FAS the pet could feel.
- 4. Communicate with the owner**
- a. When a veterinary team member uses his/her body language in such a manner that's likely to calm the animal, modeling and explaining what he/she is doing and why increases the chance of the owner trying it too. If a person already does something that's reward worthy, such as giving their dog treats or petting their cat in a soothing way, noting and praising such efforts increases the likelihood of these actions happening again.
 - b. Noting even the smallest reinforceable moment is something that can help the clients build and cement trust in the veterinary team and Fear FreeSM methods.
- 5. Facial expressions**
- a. Smiles, relaxed face muscles, and happy voices are more likely to be inviting and associated with positively associated events. On the other paw, frowns, tense faces, and tense words are likely to be perceived in a negative light.
 - b. A good tactic is always to think the word SMILE before you walk into a room, greet a pet or pet parent.
- 6. Voice /Talking to the pet**
- a. Tension may start at home with the indications the human gives off that something bad is going to happen. Word phrases or word choices, such as 'it's okay, it's okay!' even when using a reassuring voice, may instead warn the pet that it's not okay.
 - b. Pay close attention to the pet and the words the pet owner uses and the reaction as well as reactions to the common wording YOU use. Enter that in your EMR!
 - c. Silence may be especially golden.
 - d. The use of directives the animal is familiar with and enjoys, such as asking for their tricks, is one way for owners to communicate in a calming manner. It can also be a distraction technique.
- 7. Ambient Noise/Sounds**
- a. Asking the person to play calming music, such as slower classical music or species-specific music in the car is one way to fill the silence with music that's likely to encourage calmer emotions for human and pet alike.
 - b. Continuing to play soft, calming music in the hospital keeps people and a pet relaxed and fills the void where nervous words may be more likely to be spoken.
 - c. Use of Pet Tunes Canine & Feline Bluetooth[®] speakers (from <https://www.petacoustics.com>), pre-loaded with frequency-modified music clinically proven to reduce stress and calm our canine and feline patients.
 - Pet Tunes Canine calms separation anxiety, noise phobias, and excessive barking.
 - Pet Tunes Feline calms environmental stress, thunderstorm nerves, and decreases nocturnal activity.
 - Practices that have used these speakers report multi-use areas including exam rooms, post-op recovery, grooming areas, kennel areas, and during training.



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- For the pet owner, Pet Tunes are portable for travel and easy to place anywhere in the house. They can be played for 24/ or up to 8 hours wirelessly.
- 8. Change the conversation**
- a. Some clients like to have a little ‘small talk’ to feel that personal connection with the veterinary staff. It’s also a de-stressor for many. It can be a family update or more pet focused such as what their favorite thing is about their pet or what they most enjoy doing together. This is very individualized! Note it in the EMR.
 - b. When the right topic is broached, the body, voice, and mood will relax with the benefits positively impacting the pet.
- 9. Giving space**
- a. Pet owners (and team) need to understand that giving an animal space is beneficial.
 - b. Hovering assuming this is a calming effect and hugging to control an animal may actually send vibes of stress of the pet parent to the pet making it harder for the team to even approach the pet. At the same time, the veterinary team can impart similar feelings when stressed because of impending treatment or expected pet reactions. For example, ‘will bite’ stickers on the record sets the mental stage before we even enter the exam room.
 - c. Many times a pet is better off with a hands-off approach. Giving their pet space is all the green light some owners may need to leave the rest to the veterinary team. Allowing the pet to free roam in the exam room while you discuss the case and information allows the pet to acclimate and distracts the nervous owner to pay attention to you.
- 10. Environment**
- a. The environment of the hospital affects people as well as their pets.
 - b. Elements can help de-escalate nerves
 - Colors: Pets prefer simple colors that are lighter and pastel while avoiding yellows and reds (people also can become stressed in rooms with red or orange colors).
 - Lighting in the lobby and exam rooms: using incandescent or natural sunlight that can be dimmed. LEDs in the natural colors that can be dimmed are also okay.
 - Aquariums for their visual, movement, and gentle waterfall sound.
 - Television monitors with sights that prove interesting for human and pet, such as a slowly changing mountain or spring scene.
 - Smells: A light smell of lavender or chamomile may be soothing for some animals; both are associated with human relaxation as well.

Several studies (collectively the Bayer Veterinary Use Study, 2012) done almost a decade ago concerning decreased visits to seek veterinary care found visits were down due to perceived financial costs and an astounding number of pet owners that claimed their pet was stressed or ‘hated’ going to the vet. The latter information resulted in more studies on the several behavioral signs which developed the levels on the FAS Scale. To combat the decreased visits, especially for patients that need to be seen, and increased stressed felt by patient and parent alike, the veterinary team needs to incorporate the EMR and considerations above. Ideally we want to use behavior modification, but adding medication to the mix may be the key to ensure that pet patient’s Fear FreeSM veterinary visit.

It should be noted that stressors for one patient may not be for another. Triggers of FAS are whatever that patient perceives them to be and whether or not they are escapable or not. As triggers escalate, the veterinary team needs to be able to respond quickly and appropriately for that patient. The EMR is absolutely essential for every patient every time. This should include asking the pet parent about the



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trip to the practice, comparative to previous visits, the pet's day leading up to the visit, what pre-visit pharmaceuticals (PVP) were given and when, etc. Remember, open ended questions allow for the greatest information. Use words or phrases such as: describe, tell me about, what was different about this event as opposed to the last time, etc.

Offering medications for the pet should include these features:

For the Patient:

- Relief of anxiety triggers at home, during transport, and at the veterinary hospital
- Improve the rate of medicalization; elevated FAS can actually exacerbate pain causing FAS to increase in an escalating cycle

For the Owner:

- Help the owner deliver calm pets to the hospital
- Increase compliance/likelihood patients will come in for everything from happy visits to wellness, to serious needs

For the Practice

- Enhance the quality of medicine in your practice because the practice is able to efficiently do its job
- Improve safety for the veterinary team
- Improve safety for the pet and pet owner
- Improve job satisfaction of the veterinary team
- Increase revenues for the practice

Determining how to proceed:

Use the FAS Scale to assess the pet's level of Fear, Anxiety, Stress, and Pain

Lower levels can be mitigated by assessing behavioral signs and adjusting you and the pet parent's approach and handling to keep that level as low as possible.

Moderate to high FAS levels will require calming nutraceuticals and potentially sedatives, and/or anxiolytics.

Pain, Fear, Anxiety and Stress are interrelated. To stop escalation cycles of FAS due to pain, analgesics and non-analgesics such as sedatives can activate calm to break the pain cycle. The sedative can actually enhance the effect of the analgesic as a result once the FAS level is decreased. The key is to start early when we aren't fighting an uphill battle with an elevated FAS score (i.e. a ramped animal).

Level 0:

- No signs of FAS
- Pet displays relaxed body language and solicits and interacts with team members

Treatment Plan:

- Reinforce positive attitude with treats, soft voice, etc.

Level 1:

- 1 or 2 mild signs of FAS < 4 times/min
 - Lip licking, lifts paws, avoiding eye contact, turns head away, but still will take treats and interact with team members

Treatment Plan:

- Reinforce with treats/toys, soft voice
- Pause when needed



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- Consider use of pharmaceutical/ nutraceutical PVPs for next visit

Level 2:

- 1-2 signs of moderate FAS > 4 times/min
 - Ears back, tail down, furrowed brow, overly attention seeking panting
 - Will reinforce with treats, toys attention, interacts with team members

Treatment Plan:

- Take breaks, assess need for all procedures
- **Consider Pre-Visit Pharmaceuticals (PVP)/ Nutraceutical for next visit**

Level 3:

- >2 moderate signs of FAS >4 times/min
 - May refuse treats, briefly, but will take treats at times, hesitant to interact with team members

Treatment Plan:

- Discuss with client their options for completing the visit in the best interest of the pet:
- Make the decision EARLY. Higher doses are needed to calm patients the higher the excitation/anxiety/fear level
- Take breaks
- Use in-clinic sedation
- Complete what you can and reschedule the remainder of exam/procedures
- **Recommend sedative or nutraceutical PVPs for next visit**
 - Select the Pre-Visit pharmacologics (PVP) based on the pet's EMR, past responses, and the veterinarian's individual level of experience
 - NOTE for Pre-Visit pharmacologics (PVP): cat dosages are PER CAT; dog dosages are per kg
 - Be sure to update the EMR every visit so you can track medications effectiveness

Pre-Visit Pharmacologics (PVP) (PO) Options:		In-clinic Sedation <i>*Time sedation to optimize sedative effects</i>
Cats	Alprazolam 0.125-0.25 mg/CAT	Dexmedetomidine 5-15 mcg/kg IM/IV
	Lorazepam 0.25-0.5 mg/CAT	OR
	Gabapentin 100 mg/CAT	Acepromazine (sedative) 0.05-0.1 mg/kg with midazolam (anxiolytic) 0.2mg/kg IM/IV
	Trazadone 100 mg/CAT	*If painful add butorphanol or buprenorphine
Dogs	Alprazolam 0.02-0.1 mg/kg	Dexmedetomidine* 1-10 mcg/kg IM/IV <i>*In dogs, reversible with atipamezole</i>
	Diazepam 0.5-0.2 mg/kg	OR
	Lorazepam 0.02-0.1 mg/kg	Acepromazine (sedative) 0.05-0.1 mg/kg <u>with</u> midazolam (anxiolytic) 0.2mg/kg IM or IV
	Gabapentin 10-40 mg/kg	*If painful add butorphanol, buprenorphine, or pure mu agonist depending upon level of pain
	Trazadone 3-8 mg/kg	

Level 4:

- Severe signs of FAS without aggression
 - Cat: increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, tailed tuck or thrashing
 - Dog: immobility, fidgeting, escape behavior, dilated pupils, excessive panting
- May/may not accept reinforcement
- Does not interact with staff, may show active avoidance



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- These patients will not respond to considerate approach and gentle handling changes alone. Medical intervention is required

Treatment Plan:

- Initiate sedation early. If client is adverse to medication at this visit, discuss Fear FreeSM and Pre-Visit pharmacologics (PVP) as well as happy visits preparations if medically possible.
- EMR reporting is key!

In Clinic Sedation		
Feline Patient		
	Dexmedetomidine 5-20 mcg/kg IM and opioid	
	+/- midazolam 0.2 mg/kg IM	
Canine Patient		
	Dexmedetomidine* 5-10 mcg/kg IM and opioid; *In dogs, reversible with atipamezole	
	+/- midazolam 0.2 mg/kg IM	
Give opioid dependent upon level of pain – base on procedure that will be needed and anticipation of pain it will create, medicate appropriately		
>	No/mild pain	butorphanol – works synergistically and controls mild/moderate pain
>	Mild/moderate pain	buprenorphine
>	Mild/severe pain	recommend pure mu agonist

Level 5:

- Severe signs of FAS with aggression
 - Growling, lunging, barking, hissing, snarling, and/or snapping
 - Intolerant of procedures

Treatment Plan:

- Offer In-clinic sedation. Initiate sedation early.
- Recommend Pre-Visit pharmacologics (PVP) for next visit
- If client is adverse to medication at this visit, discuss Fear FreeSM and Pre-Visit pharmacologics (PVP) as well as happy visits preparations if medically possible. CAREFULLY schedule these visits paying attention to key triggers of other patients in the practice, time of day, etc.
- EMR reporting is key at every happy visit and interaction!

In Clinic Sedation		
Feline Patient		
	Dexmedetomidine 10-20 mcg/kg IM,	
	PLUS Ketamine 2-5 mg/kg,	
	OR Tiletamine/zolazepam 1-2 mg/kg,	
	AND opioid of choice <u>depending upon level of pain</u>	
Canine Patient		
	Dexmedetomidine* at 12-20 mcg/kg IM (*In dogs, reversible with atipamezole),	
	PLUS Ketamine 1-2 mg/kg (IV), 3-5 mg/kg** IM	
	(**Caution: 3-5mg/kg is too much volume IM for most dogs; consideration for PVP, route and need)	
	OR Tiletamine/zolazepam 1-2 mg/kg,	
	AND opioid of choice <u>depending upon level of pain</u>	
Give opioid dependent upon level of pain – base on procedure that will be needed and anticipation of pain it will create, medicate appropriately		
>	No/mild pain	butorphanol – works synergistically and controls mild/moderate pain
>	Mild/moderate pain	buprenorphine
>	Mild/severe pain	recommend pure mu agonist



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Conclusion of the visit:

Celebrate successes! Compare EMRs and discuss improvements seen and work that the pet parent has done at home, what has helped, the next steps to continue to move forward together as a team, and so on. Baby steps. Remind the client that sometimes there will be setbacks, but consistent practice and small, achievable goals will help their stress level decrease and help their pet's FAS scores go down and stay down. We love to see happy pets, not petrified pets!

Complementary and Alternative Pharmaceuticals (CAP):

With many clinicians, team, and pet parents concerned about over medicating pets, there are also a number of complementary and alternative medications and nutraceuticals available to aid with the anxiety and calming symptoms. Some of these; however, may be contraindicated due to reactions they may have with medications the pet is currently on or other medications we may give in hospital. L-tryptophan is a serotonin precursor that may increase serotonin levels and must be used with caution if the patient is on any other medications that increase serotonin. It also takes a long time to build up in the system to cause the antianxiolytic results and needs to be fed with a low protein diet. The take home lesson for CAP is that pet parents should NEVER medicate their pets with anything without the veterinarian's approval. Over-the-counter (OTC) medications or holistically prepared medications often vary in efficacy and content potency. Pet dosages and reactions from CAP including the cannabis and hemp families vary distinctly from humans. Enlisting a complementary/alternative medicine veterinarian if your veterinarian is not up to speed with a client's concerns on these medications for help is a very good idea. There are ongoing studies regarding CBD, cannabis oils, hemp, etc. and the different pathways they affect in both animals and humans. The newest studies indicate humans have a completely different neuronal mechanism that responds to these medications, thus anthropomorphizing medications and/or dosages is NOT healthy! There is most definitely warranted benefit in some patients with pain of disease such as cancer.

For further sedation and pharmaceutical charts and recommendations, please consider becoming a member of Fear FreeSM and download the Pre-Visit Drug Chart, Complementary and Alternative Drug Chart, and/or In-Hospital Drug Chart for use by your hospital's veterinarian and veterinary team. These can be found at: https://fearfreepets.com/fear_free_drug_charts/

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