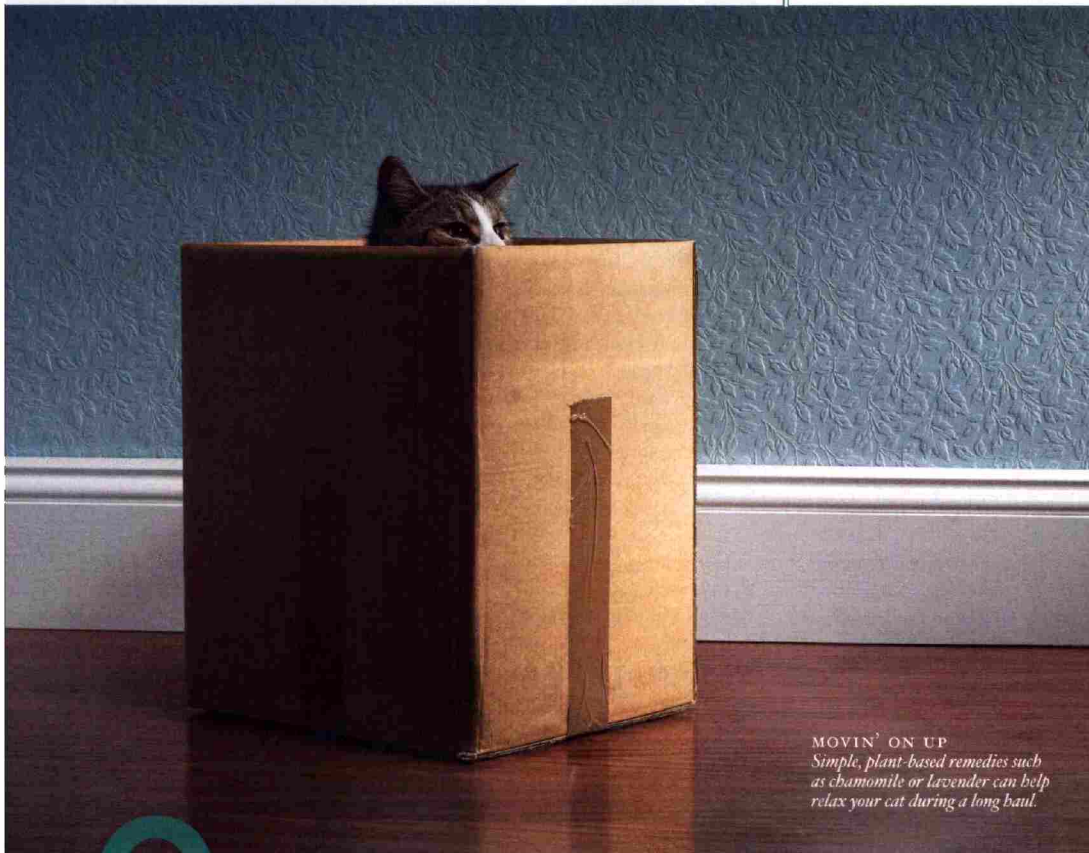


The Natural Vet

by Shawn Messonnier and Nicholas Dodman

Our expert vets share how to keep kitty calm on a long trip and tone down a hyperactive dog



MOVIN' ON UP
Simple, plant-based remedies such as chamomile or lavender can help relax your cat during a long haul.

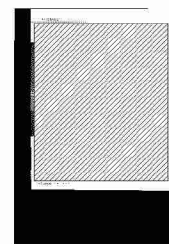
Q

I'm moving cross-country with my nine-year-old cat. I'm torn between taking her on a long road trip or on a flight. Which is better? What are the best natural ways to keep her calm during any type of travel?

KIM MILLHIMES, DENVER, CO

DR. SHAWN SAYS It's really up to you. If your cat travels well in the car, it would certainly be cheaper and easier for both of you. In my experience, most cats tend to do just fine on road trips, given that a

photo by Michael Elmann, Gettyimages



car ride allows you more freedom to comfort and pet her along the way.

But if you know she won't tolerate a car ride well, you can fly with her instead. Most airlines allow cats to travel on planes with their owners as "carry-on" in an approved carrier—always a better choice than isolating an animal with the baggage. Fees vary depending on the airline.

To ease your cat's anxiety during travel either way, try giving her a few drops of Rescue Remedy (a widely available flower essence helpful for mild anxiety, now sold in a formula especially for pets) as often as needed. Other herbal products with similar calming properties I like include NutriCalm by RX Vitamins and Composure Liquid from VetriScience.

For a simple remedy, you may also turn to lavender or chamomile oil. Both have soothing, calming properties and help many anxious pets enjoy a more pleasant ride. Put one or two drops on a cotton ball or cloth, and place into the pet's carrier. Or dilute a small amount of either oil with two parts water in a spray bottle and mist on the floor of your car about 30 minutes before traveling.

Any of these solutions might work alone, or you can try a combination approach. Talk to your vet about the best plan for your cat.

Q Lately, my dog seems hyperactive. He jumps around, eager for attention, but when I take him out for exercise, he quickly loses interest. Do dogs get ADHD? Short of medication, can I do anything about it?

JAMIE THAYER, TOLEDO, OH

DR. NICK SAYS Yes, I believe dogs can sometimes suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, in my experience, it's rare, and I doubt your dog has it. Dogs with ADHD exhibit almost incessant, relentless, hyper-energetic

behavior. To confirm diagnosis, veterinarians use a stimulant drug, such as Ritalin, which paradoxically produces a calming effect. (Curiously, one possibly hyperactive canine patient of mine developed an insatiable penchant for coffee and drained every drop left within his reach. I've often wondered whether he was self-medicating, as people sometimes do, to soothe his jittery nerves.)

There's no reason for you to consider medication for your dog now. At this point, I suggest you adjust your interactions with him rather than attempt to mask underlying problems with a pill. In all likelihood, he simply needs a behavioral tune-up to help rein in his exuberant behavior and allow him to focus more on the task (or game) at hand.

Start with the basics: a dog-friendly environment that allows for copious exercise, a sensible diet, and clear communication. Make sure to show him you're in control when he gets restless—something important for owners to maintain leadership.

Certain exercises can help dogs calm down and reduce what I call "mental noise." Train him to do a long "down stay," where he lies down for approximately a full minute, and then reward him with intermittent food treats for outward signs of relaxation: fluttering eyelids, flat ears, open mouth, slow breathing, and relaxed muscles.

Another easy way to help your dog settle down from an otherwise hectic lifestyle? Massage. Dogs enjoy it as much as we do, and its effects are long-lasting. Ask your vet to show you proper techniques.

SHAWN MESSONNIER, D.V.M., is a best-selling author and host on *Martha Stewart Living Radio, Sirius 112*. NICHOLAS DODMAN, B.V.M.S., is the program director of the *Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine* and author of the newly published *The Well-Adjusted Dog*. Send questions to our experts at pets@bodyandsoulmag.com.