

Handling and Restraint

Any cat, no matter how docile he may be, has the potential to bite when he is severely injured, frightened, or in pain. It is important to recognize this and take proper precautions to keep from being bitten. It is therefore wise to always have control of a cat's head.

There are several effective ways to handle and restrain a cat. Your choice will depend on whether the individual animal is tranquil and cooperative or frightened and aggressive. Remember that cats have five sets of weapons—one mouth and four feet. They are extremely skilled in using these weapons, and will not hesitate to do so.

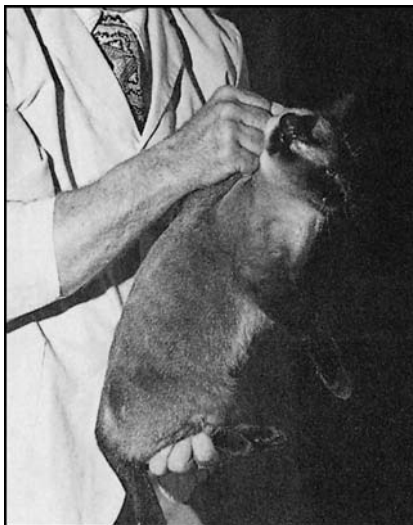
PICKING UP A CAT

As a general rule, it is advisable to reach down and pick up a cat from above. A face-to-face confrontation might provoke the cat into becoming uncooperative or aggressive.

Cooperative cats can be picked up by placing one hand around the cat beneath the chest and taking hold of the cat's front legs so they cross over each other, keeping your index finger between them for a secure grip. Pick up the cat and snuggle him close to your body, supporting his hind legs if necessary. Cradle his chin with your other hand.



To pick up an apprehensive cat, reach down and grasp him by the scruff of the neck.



Secure the back feet with your other hand.



A leash and loop restraint for an aggressive cat. The cat is immobilized by drawing the leash taut.



To keep the cat from being choked, the loop should include one front leg.

Apprehensive cats can be picked up by reaching down and lifting the cat by the scruff of his neck. Most cats under the age of 1 go limp—as they did when their mothers carried them as kittens. Older cats may not be as cooperative about scruffing. Support the cat's back feet and body with your other hand.

Frightened cats can be picked up by covering the animal with a towel. After a minute or two, as the cat becomes calmer, slide the rest of the towel underneath and lift the cat up as a bundle. This method works for aggressive cats as well, although you may want to wear thick leather gloves and use a thick blanket. It is a good idea to push a slip leash over the cat's head. This way, if he struggles and jumps out of your arms, at least he cannot completely escape.

Aggressive cats can be picked up by slipping a leash or a loop of rope over the cat's head and one front leg. Then lift the animal by the leash and set him down on a table or into a cat carrier or box. Do not attempt to lift the cat simply with a loop around his neck. This method should be used *only as a last resort* (when the method above doesn't work), because it is certain to agitate the cat further.

Another option is to use a small squeeze cage or squeeze box. The cat is lured into a special box that can be tightened gently around the body to allow for injections and a minimal physical exam. A fishing net can also be used to contain the cat, but beware of claws reaching through!

RESTRAINING FOR TREATMENT

When the cat is cooperative, routine procedures such as grooming, bathing, and medicating the cat are best carried out in quiet surroundings with a minimum of physical restraint. Approach the cat with confidence and handle him gently. If you are calm and go about this matter-of-factly, most cats handle moderate restraint and treatments reasonably well. Many can be coaxed into accepting the procedure and do not need to be restrained.

Cooperative cats can be lifted onto a smooth, raised surface, such as a tabletop or a high tier of a cat tree. The cat will be less secure—but still not frightened. Speak in a calm, soothing voice until the cat relaxes. Rubbing the ears and scratching the head will calm many cats. Place one hand around the front of the cat's chest to keep him from moving forward. Use your other hand to administer treatment.



Some cats are quite cooperative while being held by the scruff of the neck. However, some cats will object strenuously.



A cat bag restraint may be useful for treating the head, but some cats really hate getting into them.



Simply wrapping the cat in a towel is often the easier solution. Some veterinary hospitals transport their cats around the hospital this way.

Uncooperative cats can be handled in several ways, depending on the degree of agitation. If the cat is cooperative enough to permit handling. Some cats respond with quiet to simply having the scruff held and gently tugged back and forth or holding the scruff and gently tapping on the head as a distraction. This is more likely to be true for cats under age 1. If this is not the case, hold the scruff and press firmly against the top of the table so that the cat stretches out. These actions will prevent you from being scratched by the cat's rear claws.

When help is available, have your assistant stand behind the cat and place both hands around the cat's neck or front legs while pressing their arms against the cat's sides. Wrapping a towel or blanket around the cat has a calming effect and is useful for short procedures such as giving medication. An assistant is required to steady the cat and hold the wraps in place.

A coat sleeve makes an excellent restraint. The cat will often scoot into it willingly. Hold the end of the sleeve securely around the cat's neck. Now you can treat the head or tail.

Cat bags are special bags made for restraining cats. You place the cat on the unzipped bag, then quickly zip it around his body up to his neck. Some veterinarians really like them. However, cat bags are widely disliked by cats, and they struggle about getting into it and may not be calm once inside. An easier solution may be to simply wrap the cat in a towel.

There are also muzzles made especially for cats. These have a cloth circle to enclose the muzzle and, usually, a snap lock strap to go behind the ears.



An assistant is required to restrain a cat this way for a short procedure.