



# MILLENNIALS

## *and Cat-Friendly Practices*

**M**illennials may change the current course for cat healthcare. Up until now, cats have been considered more disposable than dogs, as cats are relinquished to shelters more often. If a cat gets outside, some still don't bother to search; "after all, it's just a cat."

Cats do continue to be under-medicalized. Most cats don't visit the veterinarian as often as dogs. According to the Bayer Veterinary Usage Care Studies II and III, 2011 to 2013, 83 percent of cat caretakers see a veterinarian their first year. This sounds good, but that means millions of kittens go without visiting a veterinarian in their first year. And after that, most cats never, ever see a veterinarian for preventive care.

The problem is that 58% of cat caretakers suggest their cat "hates" going to the veterinarian, and 38% indicate that, "just thinking about a veterinary visit is stressful."

However, all this may change as two factors are coming together to revolutionize the world for those of the feline persuasion.

According to the recently released American Pet Products Association (APPA) National Pet Owner's Survey and Generational Report reflecting 2016 data, the largest segment of cat owners have shifted from builders—who are seniors (previously 38%) to millennials, who are now responsible for 35% of cat homes (up from 22%).

In short, those crazy millennials are becoming as addicted to cats as they are their phones or video games. In fact, there's often an intersection of the three—hence the popularity of cat café's, and many online personalities that are now cats. Cat conventions aren't attended by little old cat

ladies, they are attended by well-educated millennials.

The APPA survey also suggests that there's now zero discrepancy in millennials' willingness to care for cats compared to dogs, and for the first time are eager to spend the same dollars on cats compared to dogs. Millennials outspend baby boomers and all other age demographic in nearly every category to support their cats, from bedding to toys, even for parasite protection.

Following up on a program developed by the International Society of Feline Medicine, the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) developed the designation of "Cat Friendly Practices" (CFP) in 2012.

It's clear—millennials are seeking better cat care. And this is all happening, simultaneous to Cat Friendly Practices, which are now finding their footing. CFP's not only provide the kind of experience millennials are seeking, but also for an increasing number of cat caretakers across all demographics.

Millennials like online research. So even before the first visit—having that Cat

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Friendly designation can matter to this group.

Most veterinary practices do not receive 99% satisfaction ratings from clients; most restaurants or hotels don't either. However, CFP's do indicate receiving 99% satisfaction ratings, according to a 2017 survey of accredited Cat Friendly Practices.

Dr. Elizabeth Colleran, AAFP co-chair of CFP, has been crisscrossing the country advocating for Cat Friendly protocols. Dr. Colleran says, "There was a recognition that the experience of cats and their owners just hasn't been good enough, and there are ways we can do better. Seeing more cats and providing better healthcare is possible, and thus a better quality of life for those cats."

Registered veterinary technician, Jan Yaroslav, adds, "Using low stress handling techniques on cats can often minimize the high stress level of the veterinary team. It's a safer and more effective way to practice."

Most importantly, when cats are panicked and have skyrocketing cortisol levels, not only is the exam not the best it can be, the client and patient experience suffers as well.

Ellen Carozza, licensed veterinary technician, says, "Veterinary professionals were pushed to make excuses for cats, blaming the cat for being mean or angry, when in reality the cat was scared."

The AAFP's recently released 2017 survey on Cat Friendly Practices, noted a 61% decrease in injuries when handling cats, by CFP survey respondents. One criticism has been that the CFP accreditation isn't rigorous enough—but results are results. Certified CFP teams appear to be more satisfied with their jobs (when it comes to cats). According the survey, 79% of practices



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say they've enjoyed an increase in revenue, and 80% say they've received more positive feedback from clients. Arguably the most important data point is that 75% of those responding to the survey indicated that feline client visits are up.

While many veterinarians are supportive of CFP, veterinary nurses appear to be the most excited. Jan Yaroslav, from Chico, CA, says, "Before using low stress handling techniques, there was higher stress level from the team. Often someone in the practice says, 'I know what we've been doing for a million years, but look what I can do by appropriately towelng a cat. And a light bulb goes on.'"

Of course, today there many available tools that simply weren't around a million years ago, or even a few years ago, ranging from feline facial pheromones (Feliway), to what we now understand about pharmacological intervention at the client's home, even before the cat goes into the carrier.

One strategy is to get those eager millennials on board as well as tomorrow's veterinarians. Purina is helping to support AAFP with communicating this important information to veterinary students.

While 2018 may be the Year of the Dog (according to the Chinese zodiac chart) we may be entering the Era of the Cat. If so, CFP's are providing the tools to pounce on this opportunity, (provided by [www.catfriendly.com](http://www.catfriendly.com)). AAFP has also launched a newsletter associated with their client-facing site, which has been opened by a whopping 37% of recipients (according to MailChimp.com, the average open rate for online newsletters is about 18%).

Currently only about 2,000 practices have become certified as a CFP, and that includes the "shoe-in" feline only practices—which presumably became certified with little effort. With around 25,000 veterinary practices in the U.S., that number is surprisingly low. Dr. Colleran believes this too will change, and soon, with proof positive that those certified as CFP's are benefiting. Meanwhile, by all accounts, millennials are ready, even eager for CFP philosophy. 

## ABOUT STEVE DALE

Steve Dale (CABC), certified animal behavior consultant, is host of three radio programs and frequently is on TV, including a regular on syndicated "HouseSmarts TV." He is a contributor/author to many books, including co-editor of *Decoding Your Dog*, authored by American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Winn Feline Foundation and Human Animal Bond Association. Sign up for Steve's blog newsletter: [www.stevedale.tv](http://www.stevedale.tv).

