Training cats for comfort with inhaled therapy

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Help! My cat needs an inhaler!

- Inhaled therapy may be prescribed for
  - Asthma
  - COPD
    - Mask and chamber (spacer) needed

- Don’t panic!
  - Simple and fun to teach your cat
  - Cats that learn to voluntarily participate
  - Positive reinforcement training
  - Better for long-term treatment provision
  - Cat remaining comfortable and content
Voluntary Participation  Long-term Treatment Compliance  Comfortable and Content
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First, make a plan...

Aerocat training for *Cat Care* (June/July 2020)

- Concepts/Skills needed:
  - Various scent
  - Spray can inhaler
  - Handling of device
  - Duration
  - Face in object

- Initial use
  - Record 1st
  - General
  - Human stimulus

- Dilute: soap
  - Solution
  - Generalise concept

- Duration
  - Increase volume
  - Then "live"

- Teach specific location?
  - Cue to come/participate?
    - "Start button"

- Put it all together!
  - (Backchain)

- Overall
  - Plan:
    - 1-2 x 2-4 minute sessions daily
    - When chooses to be in/interactive

- Alternate with kibble/cues
  - Use from fixed ration
  - May need to escalate treats? Plan?
Training goals

- Overarching goal
  - Cat voluntarily approaches mask/chamber
  - Puts nose in
  - Holds their face in the mask
  - Calmly takes “x” breaths
Sub-goals — each trained individually
What will I need? Get set for success!
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R+!
What will I need? Get set for success!
What will I need? Get set for success!
What will I need? Get set for success R+!
**Intro to equipment:**

Inhaler/chamber are no threat

Scatter treats for cat to explore

Reward calm interactions (petting/food)
Getting started:

Luring (with food)

Shaping (easier to harder)

Marking

Followed by a treat
Start easy and work toward goal
Big pots → mask
Open-ended objects to **feed through**

Builds **confidence** and **good associations**
Feed on flat plate → big pot → smaller objects → mask

Feed through open ends

THEN mask

Easy! It’s just another object!
Feed on flat plate → big pot → smaller objects → mask

Feed through open ends

THEN mask

Easy! It’s just another object!

DON’T – move the object TOWARDS the cat

DO - be sure the cat CHOOSES to interact ✓
Comfort with new things

“This predicts that”

Aerosol wrapped in a towel

Muffled “hissing” - PREDICTS rewards
Comfort with new things

“This predicts that”

Aerosol wrapped in a towel

Muffled “hissing” - PREDICTS rewards
Cats very sensitive to smell

Medication = unfamiliar scent

May upset cat without preparation

Introduce a variety of innocuous scents

Scent predicts treats
Cats very sensitive to smell

Medication = unfamiliar scent

May upset cat without preparation

Introduce a variety of innocuous scents

Scent predicts treats
Now we can get to the specific training for mask/chamber/treatment
Turn mask inside out
(Should look flat)

Lure nose

Click for nose in mask

Feed through mask
Shape voluntary approaches

Lure interest

Mark (“click”)

Feed out of mask
Confidence with *assembled* chamber

Lure with food in chamber

Click!

Feed outside mask
Add a cue

An invitation. **Gives choice:**

**CATS IN CONTROL!**

Visual or verbal

*Only* when *well understood*

Just *as cat approaches*
Ensure **comfort** & **voluntary** participation

- Take training **slowly**
- If in doubt, stop!
- Be sure your cat is **happy, engaged** and **in control**

**Cat must have a voice & a choice!**

Lili Chin:
Duration = increase time cat can do task

- Voluntarily approach and hold still
Duration – concept training
Duration = increase time cat can do task
• Voluntarily approach and hold still
• Inc. calm acceptance of objects on body
Duration = increase time cat can do task

• Voluntarily approach and hold still
• Inc. calm acceptance of objects on body
• Multiple breaths in mask
Hands, or mask, on body: **Click!**

Hands/mask off body: **Feed**

Withhold click for **longer/shorter**

**Towards & away** from face

Helps **comfort with pressure**
Keep going until counting more/less breaths, rather than seconds!

If Flow-Vu is moving, there is enough pressure & a good seal
Comfort with treatment

• Shake inhaler (→ feed)
• Insert inhaler (→ feed)
• Depress - away from cat (→ feed)

Break down into steps for first few repetitions
Comfort with treatment

- Shake inhaler (→ feed)
- Insert inhaler (→ feed)
- Depress - away from cat (→ feed)
- Click for nose in mask (Feed out of mask)
- Accept less when all is new
- Don’t worry about duration or pressure initially
Teach **comfort in having the face wiped**

- Start with soft dry cloth, then slightly damp, then a little more damp
  - *Top tip* - use warm water!
- Click/mark *while* for calmly accepting → remove cloth → give treat
Four breaths → break → four breaths
Full treatment sequence → Eight breaths → Cat in complete control!
Review plan

Aerocat® training for "Cat Care" (June/July 2020)

- Concepts/ Skills needed:
  - Varied scent
  - Syringes/inhaler
  - Handling of device
  - Duration
  - Face of object

  *Cail use drugs
  *Household scents

Dilute: soap
- Generalise concept
- Must be nonaversive

- Teach specific location?
- Cue to come/participate?
  - "Start button"

Plan:
- 1-2 x 2-4 minute sessions daily
- When chooses to be in/interactive

- Overall

Alternate with known cues
- Use from fixed ration
- May need to escalate treats? Plan?
Top Tips For Cat-Training Success:

• Think cat!

• Make it fun!

• Catch 'em in the act – of doing something wanted! Reward what you want more of

• Never punish or coerce – unkind, unfair, counterproductive

• Keep sessions short and sweet! 1-2 minutes

• Rate of reward should be high

• No distractions. Set up for success

• Be a splitter, not a lumper! Break down into steps

• It's all in the timing

  What you click is what you get!

• Be consistent and fair – go with the cat!
See video series…

• Overview video: “Training your cat to be comfortable with AeroKat* Chamber use”

• Step 1: “Mastering the training techniques for AeroKat* Chamber comfort”

• Step 2: “Introducing your cat to the AeroKat* Chamber”

• Step 3: “Teaching your cat to voluntarily place their nose in the AeroKat*mask”

• Step 4: “Teaching your cat to hold their nose in the AeroKat* Chamber for the duration of their treatment”

• Step 5: “Teaching your cat to be comfortable inhaling medication”
Conclusion:

• It’s possible
• It’s fun
• It takes time & care
• May need vet & behaviour/training support

If Olive can do it, every cat can