



## *Harness Training your Cat*

**When harness/leash training a cat, we shouldn't expect to be able to just put the harness on, snap on the leash and have our cat be completely okay with the process. Unfortunately, for most cats, it doesn't work that way! We're aiming to *gradually de-sensitize* our cat to the touch and feel of the harness making it a pleasant (if not happy) experience for everyone!**

Having your cat wear a harness and leash is *not* a substitute for a proper cat carrier when traveling. Harnesses are to be used only for those times when you are required to have your cat on a leash; for example, visiting a care facility as a volunteer ARL TheraPets team.

Your cat may be used to wearing a collar, but a collar should never be used as an anchoring point for a leash. Most cat collars are breakaway style; this is a safety feature as they are expected to break open if the collar gets caught on something. Since a harness will not break away if it gets entangled, a cat should never wear a harness unsupervised, whether indoors or out.

There is a variety of cat harnesses to choose from: the "H" style, figure 8 style, mesh and the Gentle Leader brand are the ones featured below. The figure 8 is made of two loops; one loop goes around the cat's neck, the other around the torso and the leash connects at the back of the neck. The "H" style harness connects the two loops with an additional piece, to which the leash connects. The mesh & Gentle Leader are also "H" type harness, just a different variation of that style.

There is no right or wrong harness, though many cat owners feel the figure 8 style tends to pull on their cat's neck more than the others.

As for the leash, a short (4 ft.) and *lightweight* nylon/leather leash is all you need.



**Figure 8 style harness**



**H-style harness**



**Mesh style harness**



**Gentle Leader brand harness**

## **Now for the Training...**

It will take time and patience, but it can be done! Be sure to have plenty of your cat's favorite treats ready before you start. Remember to take it slow! All training should be done INDOORS - never do harness training with your cat outside; and never take your cat outdoors without the harness/leash.

Keep in mind that not every cat can be trained to *walk* on a leash, but it is necessary for them to be able to *comfortably* wear the harness and leash in order to be a therapy cat and visit facilities.

### **The Harness**

- Leave the harness near your cat's food or favorite sleeping spot for several days. The idea is to get your cat used to the sight and smell. Hold the harness and let your cat sniff it while offering treats and praise.
- Drape the harness over your cat's shoulders (while giving treats) then remove the harness immediately. Continue this on/off action with the harness (without buckling it!) on your cat.
- Next, place the harness onto your cat, snapping it loosely in place (don't forget the treats!), and remove it after only a few moments. Continue to do this over several days/weeks or until your cat is accepting of the harness (not trying to get out of, nor showing signs of stress while wearing the harness).
- Now leave the harness on your cat for short periods of time (10-15 minutes, always supervised!) every day.

*\*\*The harness should initially fit loosely. Over time, slowly tighten it until your cat is comfortable wearing the harness properly fitted (a proper fit means your two fingers fit snug between the harness and the cat).*

### **The Leash**

- Make sure your cat is stress-free while wearing the harness before ever attempting to attach the leash.
  - You are still indoors, so no need to even hold the leash—we are simply getting your cat comfortable with the feel of the leash attached to the harness!
- Once you attach the leash, let it drag gently behind your cat (remember, the leash should be lightweight).
  - Do this for short periods of time while giving treats and praise.
- Once your cat is comfortable with this step, it's time to pick up the leash and follow your cat around the house. Remember - do not pull on the leash; let your cat guide you.

**You must always keep calm, casual and positive about the entire process,  
and never use force or get upset with your cat.**

**With time, your cat will begin to associate the harness/leash with the treats and praise you give!**

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### **Bonus Training Tip!**

If your cat is really comfortable with the process thus far, *while still safely indoors*, take a step forward in front of your cat, and hold out a treat at eye level. As your cat sniffs and walks to get the treat, say out loud "Let's walk". Give the reward and repeat, taking another step forward, holding out another treat (keep a stock in your pocket for this exercise) and again repeat the words "Let's walk" and provide the treat as your Kitty takes those steps following you.

Repeat this several times until your cat becomes used to following you!