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Pinch-induced behavioural inhibition (clipthesia) as a restraint method for cats during veterinary examinations: preliminary results on cat susceptibility and welfare

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Abstract

Cats are often subjected to minimally painful or forced procedures during routine clinical practice, which can be poorly tolerated, leading veterinary surgeons to need to offer physical restraint, usually aided by an assistant. The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness and ultimate welfare implications of using clipthesia as a method of restraint during veterinary examination. This was carried out in a real clinical setting and compared to manual scruffing. Twenty-seven cats were restrained, during a veterinary examination, using two stationary clips placed on the skin along the cervical dorsal midline, whilst a group of 13 cats were restrained through gentle manual scruffing. Susceptibility to clipthesia (ie a positive clip score) was observed in 81.5% of cats, while a complete response was found in 40.7% of subjects. The presence or absence of a disease/condition did not affect the susceptibility. Heart rate and the number of cats showing mydriasis (pupillary dilation) was statistically higher during manual scruffing, whilst plasma cortisol did not differ between the two groups. The more responsive the cats were to clipthesia, the more they displayed kneading and purring. These preliminary findings suggest that clipthesia is not more stressful than manual scruffing in restraining cats during a veterinary examination. However, not all cats were found to be susceptible to this method of restraint. Further research is needed to clarify whether clipthesia should be implemented as a matter of course in veterinary practice from the point of view of welfare and safety.

Keywords: animal welfare, cat, clipnosis, clipthesia, scruffing, veterinary examination