



Most pets will have an operation at some stage in their life, eg for neutering (spaying or castration) or to treat a disease. Nowadays most operations in dogs and cats are fairly safe but the success of treatment and recovery depends to some extent on the quality of care that the owner gives before and after the operation.

What do I do before the operation?

If the operation is not an emergency it may be useful for you to arrange some time off work so that you are around to take care of your pet during the recovery period. The risks of any complications during or after surgery have been much reduced by improvements in surgical techniques and in the safety of the anaesthetics used. Since the stress of an operation can lower your pet's resistance to infectious disease check that your cat's vaccinations are up-to-date before it has surgery. Vomiting is dangerous when your pet is under an anaesthetic and to reduce the risk of this you will have been asked not to give your pet any food after about 8.00 pm the previous evening but water should be freely available until the time you leave home.

How will my cat be prepared for surgery?

Most veterinary clinics do their routine operations in the late morning or early afternoon. Your vet will ask you to take your pet to the surgery at a particular time. It is important not to be late so that there is time to prepare your pet for its anaesthetic. A small patch of fur may be shaved from your pet's leg so that your vet can give intravenous injections or fit instruments to monitor your pet during the anaesthetic. When you leave your pet you will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you know the purpose of the operation and agree to have it done.

When will my pet be able to come home?

When your pet is admitted for their operation, you will be asked to leave a telephone number where you can be contacted and you will usually be told a time when you can ring to check your pet's progress. After routine operations most animals should be ready to come home within a few hours of waking up from the anaesthesia. Some animals take longer to come round and your vet will not allow the release of your pet until they are fully conscious. The vet or veterinary nurse will tell you when your pet can eat and drink again, whether they will need any medication and when they will need to be brought back to have their stitches (sutures) removed.

What happens when my pet comes home?

Keep your pet warm on its journey home. At home your pet should be left in a warm, quiet room until it is fully recovered. Cats should be kept indoors (with access to a litter tray) and dogs should not be taken for a walk (they can be let out in the garden to relieve themselves) for at least 24 hours. Try to keep your pet quiet because any sudden movements may put a strain on the stitches. Ideally cats should be confined until their stitches have been removed. Your vet may prescribe pain killers, antibiotics or some other drugs to keep your cat comfortable and prevent infection. Many owners find it helpful to draw up a chart and tick off each dose when it is given so that nothing is forgotten.

Will my pet be ill after the anaesthetic?

It is quite common for an animal to appear 'groggy' for a few hours after a general anaesthetic and it may sleep longer and more deeply than normal. Your pet may be a little unsteady on its feet at first. If your pet is hungry it may be given a small meal when you get home. Warming the food and feeding by hand may help to encourage your pet to eat if they have a poor appetite. Occasionally, your pet may feel sick and may vomit - if this happens give it plenty of water but do not feed it for 24 hours. A tube is put down your pet's throat during the anaesthetic to help it breathe and occasionally this irritates the windpipe and may cause it to cough for a few days.

What signs should I look for?

Caring for your pet before and after surgery



If your pet is still dull or moving unsteadily when he has been home for 24 hours you should call your vet for advice. If the stitches have come out or split, or if there are any convulsions (fits), prolonged retching or vomiting or signs of swelling, discharges or bleeding from the operation wound contact your vet immediately.

Can you stop cats pulling out stitches?

Most animals try to lick their wounds but they should eventually get used to having stitches. Wounds heal faster if they are kept clean and dry and left open to the air. Try to avoid bandaging wounds and always stop your pet if you see it licking its stitches. If your pet does try to remove his stitches your vet may give you an Elizabethan collar to fit around their neck to prevent them licking or scratching at the wound.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your pet Vetstream advise you to contact your local veterinary practice.