



Pre and post-operative care

YOUR GUIDE TO CARING FOR YOUR PET BEFORE AND AFTER AN OPERATION



Animal Welfare Foundation

www.bva-awf.org.uk

AWF is the charity led by the veterinary profession

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Pre and post-operative care of your pet

There's a fair chance that at some time in its life your pet will need to have some kind of sedation or anaesthetic. It may surprise you at first that things like dental treatments or an x-ray need an animal to be fully anaesthetised, but unlike humans, our pets are not very good at holding still or saying 'aaahh'. For your peace of mind it's important that you know what to expect.



Many people worry about anaesthetics and their safety. All operations and anaesthetics do carry some degree of risk but your vet will do everything to make sure these risks are as low as possible and should be happy to talk you through everything they will be doing.

For most procedures your pet will need a full, or general, anaesthetic. This means they will be unconscious and completely unaware of anything that is being done and will feel no pain during the procedure. There will be things your vet will need you to do before and after the surgery to help keep the risks down and to help your pet recover quickly and comfortably.

This leaflet gives you some general information but your vet may want you to do something different so please listen carefully to the instructions given to you by the vet or nurse.

Before the operation

On the day of the operation you will probably be asked to take your pet to the surgery first thing. This is so that your animal can have any pain-killers or pre-anaesthetic injections in plenty of time. These will calm your pet and help to keep the anaesthetic dose as low as possible.

For some animals and operations you will be asked to make sure your pet hasn't had any food or drink for a certain amount of time. It is very important you remember and follow these instructions. Bear in mind any other animals you may have in your house and remove their food too if it is safe to do so or confine your pets so that they can't get to the others' food and water. Not all animals should be starved before an anaesthetic. Restricting food in small pets like rabbits and guinea pigs can be dangerous so if you're unsure, just ask. Keep cats in overnight—not only could a mouse after midnight be too tempting but you may not be able to catch your cat when the time comes to go to the surgery.

On the morning of the operation try to encourage your pet to go to the toilet before you get to the vet. Providing a litter tray for cats or taking dogs for a short walk will usually do the job.





On admission

You will probably need to leave your pet at the surgery for the day. The person in charge of admitting your pet will need to ask a few details. At this point make sure you ask any questions you have and discuss any concerns. This is also a time you can mention any extras you'd like done that might be easier while your pet is asleep like microchipping or nail clipping.

You will be asked to sign a consent form to give the vet permission to give the anaesthetic and carry out the procedure. Every anaesthetic has some risk attached to it. Rest assured that your pet will be thoroughly examined beforehand and constantly monitored during the whole procedure. Your vet may recommend that your pet has a pre-anaesthetic blood test. This is another way your vet can assess the risks for your pet. A drip may also be recommended to reduce the risk for elderly or sick animals. Be sure to leave a contact telephone number or two and to make a note of when and who to phone for a progress report.

Before the operation

Your pet will be weighed to ensure accurate drug doses are given. A pre-med drug may be administered to reduce anxiety, provide mild sedation and pain relief. Your pet will have a comfortable bed in a kennel allowing time for the pre-med drug to have its full effect.

While your pet is away from home

Make sure everything is ready for when you collect your pet. Organise transport and consider whether you might need an extra pair of hands getting your pet in or out of the car.

Your pet is likely to be drowsy and although they will be able to walk, any amount of walking can be tiring and is not recommended. At home, provide a comfortable bed away from draughts. If your pet has had surgery, jumping onto furniture or going upstairs will be difficult so try to make sure this can be avoided. Don't forget to phone the surgery for a progress report and to find out when you can collect your pet.

Collecting your pet

Your pet might still be a bit drowsy and looking slightly sorry for themselves. There may be a large wound, bandages or a cone collar fitted. Although you may be keen to see your pet as soon as possible, it is advisable to speak to the vet or the nurse beforehand. This lets the team give you all the information and instructions you need without you being distracted and it's also a perfect time for you to ask any questions that you have thought of during the day. You can also settle your bill and organise any check-up appointments your pet needs.

Depending on the type of animal your pet is and what has been done you may need to change what you normally feed for a day or two. Many vets can or will provide some easily digested recovery food for dogs and cats to make life simple and do ask for some if you would like it. For rabbits it is vital that they start eating as soon as possible when you bring them home, you may need to syringe feed a special recovery diet (pureed pellets are a good alternative) if they don't want to eat. If your rabbit is still not eating the day after the anaesthetic please contact your vet. Whatever your pet, make sure you've been told what is the best thing to feed when you get home.

Obviously many procedures can cause some discomfort in the hours or days afterwards so talk to your vet or nurse about what to expect. Animals have different pain thresholds just like humans and different species show pain in different ways. For example, dogs may whine, cry or limp in quite an obvious way but small pets like rabbits and rodents may become quiet and withdrawn and stop eating. Make sure you know how painful the operation is likely to be and what to watch for. Your vet will try to make sure your pet is as comfortable as possible and send you home with extra medication if necessary but if you are at all unsure do contact your vet and get help.

Instructions for post-operative care will vary depending on what your pet is and the type of surgical procedure it has undergone. However, some basic guidelines are set out in the bullet-points below.

Post-operative care — the basics

- Your pet may be drowsy for a period of time. Ask the vet or nurse what to expect so that you know what's normal.
- Provide your pet with a comfortable bed or basket away from draughts and noise. Don't let young children and other animals disturb them.
- Occasional vomiting may occur in the immediate post-operative period. Light palatable meals, given little and often, can help reduce the likelihood of this. If your vet has given you special food to feed make sure you use it. If vomiting occurs, consult your vet.
- Exercise may need to be restricted. For at least 24 hours after an operation cats should be kept indoors and dogs restricted to short lead-walks. Make sure you follow your vet's advice about exercise, especially after orthopaedic surgery.

Make sure you know what signs of discomfort to look out for and have talked to your vet about any pain relief your pet may need.

**Ask
your
vet**

- Check the wound daily. There is usually no need for you to bathe the wound but it is very important that you prevent your pet from licking it. Licking and chewing a wound can quickly damage or infect it. This may lead to your pet needing antibiotics and, if the wound has opened, more surgery may be required to repair it. Special collars, dressings and medical t-shirts are ways of preventing this and do ask at the surgery if you need one. If your pet's been sent home with one do use it. Contact your vet if the appearance of the wound changes, for example if it looks swollen and red or starts to discharge.
- Bandages must be kept clean and dry. They must be checked daily for signs of swelling above or below the bandage, or seepages, discharges, unpleasant smells and so on. If at all concerned, contact your vet straight away.
- Make sure you give any medication at the correct dose and that you finish the course.
- Perhaps most importantly if you become at all concerned about your pet's health at any time, not just after surgery, do not hesitate to contact your vet.





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AWF is the charity led by the veterinary profession. We are committed to improving the welfare of all animals through veterinary science, education and debate.

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