

Toronto Humane Society's Pre & Post-Operative FAQ

- 1. RISKS, WAIVERS, AND DENIED CONDITIONS...1
- 2. PROCEDURE INQUIRES & STAFF QUALIFICATION...2
- 3. POST-OPERATIVE CARE...3
 - 3A. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – BEHAVIOUR & MEDICATIONS...4
 - 3B. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – RECOVERY ISOLATION & E-COLLAR...5
 - 3C. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – EXERCISE LIMITATION...6
 - 3D. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – TRANSPORTATION...6
 - 3E. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – CLEANING...7

1. RISKS, WAIVERS, AND DENIED CONDITIONS:

I'm so nervous, is my animal going to be ok? How often do animals die during surgery?

The reported risk of anaesthetic death is 0.12% (12 per 10,000). Due to our strict eligibility requirements we further reduce this risk as our patients are required to be young and healthy, and generally recover very well after a short sterilization procedure. Please rest assured that our medical team is highly skilled and qualified. We have veterinarians with years of experience (no volunteers or students) and our veterinary technicians are registered, meaning they have attended school and continue to complete continuing education to keep their designation.

What are the chances my unvaccinated pet will pick up an infection from another animal while they're in the clinic? (Kennel cough or sneezing, for example)

While we cannot quantify this risk as a percentage, we do need to warn clients that this risk is still present despite our best efforts and biosecurity protocols. Our protocols ensure proper sanitization techniques are used between patients and each patient is housed in their own cage. However during the intake or discharge process we have many animals entering a small environment with unknown vaccination or sometimes unclear health status and any interactions are outside of our control.

What are the odds that my pet will have a serious vaccination reaction while they are under anesthesia?

Severe vaccine reactions are rare (about 1 in 2,000 animals). However, there is still a small risk that anaphylactic reactions can occur as a result of vaccination. This can include pale gums, rapid heart-rate, low blood pressure, collapse, and swelling of face and airways - all of which can be fatal if not caught and treated promptly. When patients are under anaesthetic, these symptoms may not be noticed immediately, increasing the risk for death should this reaction occur. While rare, we do need to inform all owners to ensure proper informed consent prior to vaccination administration.

If vaccinations are not recommended on the same day, then why do you do them?

Our policy at the Toronto Humane Society is to see all animals leaving our facility up to date with vaccinations. By increasing our responsibility to decrease local disease transmission we are increasing the health and safety for both animals and humans in our community. While we strongly recommend vaccinations are completed prior to surgery to protect the animal's health and welfare, we understand that is not always feasible so still continue to offer them on the same day of surgery to remove barriers from patients requiring sterilization service.

Why do I need to sign these additional waivers?

Waivers are provided in the event additional risks are determined while assessing one's animal. Ensuring clients receive proper informed consent prior to surgery or vaccinations is very important and these documents are legally binding. It is important that the owner reads and asks any questions before signing these important documents for their pet's medical care.

Why can't my overweight pet have surgery?

Very overweight animals require more individualized anaesthetic monitoring because their breathing can be compromised under anaesthetic. The fat under the skin, and in the abdomen also make the surgery slower and more technically challenging, and may interfere with incision healing. We encourage owners to keep their pets in a good body condition score to increase their welfare and life span as overweight pets are prone to diabetes and arthritis due to extra weight on their joints. In the event your animal is denied our veterinarian will recommend monitored weight loss with your veterinarian who can create a specific plan for your pet's needs and discuss low calorie diets, food enrichment, and caloric intake needed for healthy weight loss.

For more information on cat body condition scoring please visit: <https://www.purina.co.uk/cats/health-and-nutrition/exercise-and-weight-management/assessing-your-cat's-body-condition>

For more information on dog body condition scoring please visit: <https://www.purina.co.uk/dogs/health-and-nutrition/exercise-and-weight-management/assessing-your-dogs-body-condition>

Is it safe for my pet to have surgery without IV fluids?

IV fluids are generally recommended for all procedures to keep your pet hydrated and allow for quick access to a vein to administer medications in case of emergencies. Our surgical services have strict eligibility requirements to ensure the animals coming into our high volume service can safely undergo the procedure without receiving fluids. If our veterinarian determines that your animal is unsuitable for our surgical services they will deny the patient **as their safety is our primary focus**. As a high volume surgical service our veterinarians are trained specifically in high volume sterilization procedures which significantly decrease surgical times, thus reducing the risk of dehydration or chances of complications. In the event a complication arises or the surgical procedure is taking longer than expected our medical team will not hesitate to administer fluids to keep your pet safe and healthy.

2. PROCEDURE INQUIRIES & STAFF QUALIFICATION:

How can your team perform so many surgeries in one day? Is my cat/dog going to go through a surgical assembly line?

As a high volume clinic our surgical services are very streamlined and efficient compared to a standard veterinary practise. Surgical procedure times are reduced due to the training, technique, and skill of our surgeons and support team. We require all patients to arrive on time and have set booking limitations to safely complete the allotted number of surgeries each day while making sure not to compromise patient safety and welfare. Additional personalized service such as private intake/discharge, IV fluid administration, extra procedures such as extraction of baby teeth, declaw removal etc. are not offered, as these increase times required for each patient. Clients who are interested in these services are referred to their local veterinarian.

Is it a veterinarian performing the procedure today or is it students/volunteers?

All veterinarians performing surgery in our spay/neuter clinic have extensive training in high-volume spay/neuter procedures and are employed by the Toronto Humane Society. We do not accept students or volunteers in our public clinic.

Do you have someone take them out for a pee/poop?

All surgical patients are fasted overnight and therefore unlikely to have a bowel movement after arrival to our clinic. We encourage owners to take canine patients for a walk prior to drop off. Once animals are sedated for surgery they are too lethargic to safely walk outdoors. For females, the bladder is expressed at the time of surgery. Please note all cages are lined with absorbent material which is cleaned promptly in the event your animal has an accident. Sometimes accidents do happen in the carrier or on the way home.

Do they feel any pain during the procedure?

Our surgical services and pain relief methods follow the guidelines outlined by the American Animal Hospital Association and the Humane Alliance. All procedures are performed under anaesthetic so your animal is not conscious during the surgery. Appropriate pain medications are administered during and after the procedure to ensure your animal is not painful while recovering. Of course if you feel your animal is painful after the surgery and requires additional pain medication we will happily offer a recheck appointment to have one of our veterinarians assess your animal and determine if they require more pain relief.

The intake video mentions a small snack is provided, what food are they getting?

All patients are fed a small snack to ensure their glucose levels remain adequate following the procedure (to avoid low blood sugar). The food offered is a high quality veterinary gastro-intestinal diet, meaning it has been proven to reduce stomach upset and is safe to use on animals with varying dietary needs.

What is the difference between a reducible and non-reducible umbilical hernia? Can't they both be corrected at surgery? If not, will there be further medical care/treatment?

Umbilical hernias are identified by a bulging under the skin at the bellybutton, and are caused by an incomplete closure of the umbilical ring after birth. A reducible hernia is one where the contents can be pushed back into the abdomen and can be quickly corrected during the spay/neuter procedure (for an additional \$20.00). A non-reducible hernia means the umbilical ring has closed, or some of the abdominal contents have adhered to the opening, not allowing them to be pushed back in. In the case of non-reducible hernias, most often they are simply cosmetic and not a medical concern, but in the event they require further treatment/surgical correction our medical staff will inform you of our recommendations.

Why does my male need the tattoo? He'll look fixed from outside no?

Some male cats and dogs can have a condition known as cryptorchidism. This is when the testicle(s) have not descended out of the abdominal cavity and remain inside the animal (not visible from the outside). Should your animal get lost and is found by a shelter, rescue, or brought to a local veterinarian, one of the first procedures completed is to ensure the animal is sterilized. Without visible scarring from neuter procedures this can be difficult to determine. Veterinary staff might shave for a surgical procedure, and would then notice a green tattoo. This would alert them that the animal has already been sterilized and save your animal from undergoing an unnecessary surgical procedure and anaesthetic. (The tattoo is not visible once your pet's hair regrows over the surgical site so it only becomes visible if they are shaved)

Why does the discharge process take time? I'll be in a rush to get home...

After any procedure it is important you understand the proper post-operative care instructions for your pet, to ensure an uncomplicated and safe recovery period. You will be required to watch another video and hear a short presentation from our veterinary assistants. At the time of receiving your animal you will also be notified of any specific information or instructions for your pet, and I'm sure one can appreciate that this does take time.

Why can't I see any stitches (sutures)?

Here at the Toronto Humane Society we use dissolvable stitches for our spay/neuter procedures. They are hidden under the skin and not visible from the outside. We do not require any recheck examinations for suture removal as these stitches are designed to dissolve on their own in a few months.

3. POST-OPERATIVE CARE

Here is a short video which sums up nicely the at home recovery needs for the week following surgery:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSexzL-hy0>

I have plans tonight, is it ok to leave my pet alone after I drop him/her off at home?

We would strongly recommend someone be present for the full evening to following morning after surgery. In the event of a serious surgical complication or vaccination reaction these symptoms usually appear in the first 24-48 hours. It is also important to be able to feed your pet the small meal post-surgery and monitor them in the home environment to determine if anything needs to be moved or adjusted to make eating/drinking/walking/using the litterbox easier. In the event something urgent comes up we recommend you have someone babysit, or seek boarding services during your absence.

3A. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – BEHAVIOUR & MEDICATIONS

Why doesn't my cat get pain medication to go home?

Our veterinarians have been trained in a high volume surgical techniques which significantly cut down the procedure times and handling of tissue/incision length. Due to this efficient and precise surgical technique and pain management throughout and after the procedure, cats have been found to not require additional pain medication post-surgery. In the event your animal is lethargic or appears painful when you get home, we welcome you to give us a call to schedule a recheck examination where our veterinarian can determine if more pain medication is necessary to keep your animal comfortable.

What time of day do I have to give my dog their "Metacam" (pain relief medication)? Should I give it to them before or after they eat?

Metacam must always follow a meal to prevent upset stomachs and the possible side effects associated with this pain medication. We would recommend giving it the following morning or afternoon after your pet's breakfast or lunch. If your pet is still not eating by the following evening please do not give the medication and call us to schedule a recheck appointment.

Is only 3 days of pain medication enough for my dog? Can I request and pay for more upfront?

Our veterinarians have been trained in a high volume surgical techniques which significantly cut down the procedure times and handling of tissue/incision length. Due to this efficient and precise surgical technique, and pain management throughout and after the procedure, dogs have been found to not require more than 3 days of pain relief post-surgery. We do not dispense more than 3 days' worth of pain medication unless our veterinarian recommends it due to surgical complications or an extended procedure time/handling. In the event your animal is lethargic or appears painful after the prescription has run out, we welcome you to give us a call to schedule a recheck examination where our veterinarian can determine if more pain medication is needed to keep your animal comfortable.

Do you think my pet's behavior will change?

As behaviours are influenced by many factors such as environmental stimuli, hormones, and an animal's ability to learn various behaviours, this answer varies for each patient. Reproductive behaviours associated with a hormonal response for intact animals are affected in a positive way. Roaming, howling, heat cycles (mate attraction behaviours) will diminish or disappear. Any learned behaviours that can be influenced by hormones, such as aggression and spraying, might decrease but this cannot be guaranteed. Overall change in personality has not been found to be happen after sterilization in many scientific studies which have tested the effects of spay/neutering on behaviour. Our recommendation is to always consult with a veterinarian to rule out any underlying medical issues with your animal which might be contributing to the unwanted behaviour, and once ensured there is no medical concern, work with a behaviourist or trainer to correct.

If my animal gets lost can they find me by the tattoo?

The tattoo is simply a green dot or line (no larger than 1 cm in length) which gets covered with your pet's fur once the hair regrows around the incision. Since this tattoo is not a number, there is no way for it to be entered in any databases, or show up on a scanner. **We strongly recommend microchipping** for its ability to be safely implanted under your pet's skin and store a number that gets displayed on a microchip scanner once your pet is scanned. Please note that microchips do not store personal information themselves or act as a GPS. The microchip company holds the owner information and owners are responsible for updating their contact information with the microchip company at the time of any changes.

Do you think my pet will stop marking his territory now? He's driving me crazy!

While spraying is a reproductive behaviour, the act of marking one's territory can become a learned behaviour and might not resolve with sterilization. It is also important to rule out underlying medical issues which can contribute to house-soiling. We recommend consulting with your veterinarian, and consulting a behaviourist in the event it has not resolved after surgery. The Toronto Humane Society has behaviourists on site so we welcome you to consult with them by calling: 416-392-2273 ext.3.

3B. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – RECOVERY ISOLATION & E-COLLAR

Is it ok for my pet to be with the other pets in my home?

At first your pet should remain isolated from other pets in the household unless under supervision. While an animal's e-collar protects themselves from licking at the incision, there is no barrier for other animals to groom/lick allowing them to reach the incision area which can result in infection and poor healing. Other pets can also initiate rough play or increased exercise which can also impact healing. We strongly recommend that animals are separated for the full 7 to 10 days in a quiet room with low furniture (prevent jumping) unless they are being watched closely.

I live in a bachelor apartment, there is no way I can keep my pet separated from my other animals. What should I do?

We recommend you keep your pet in the bathroom or large crate when you are unable to supervise them around other animals. Alternatives can be seeking a boarding facility with veterinary professionals for the patient or other pets, or boarding with family/friends for the 7-10 days.

Both of my pets had surgery today, do I still have to separate them?

Yes. While an animal's e-collar protects them from licking at the incision, there is no barrier for other animals to groom/lick allowing others to reach the incision area which can result in infection and poor healing. Other pets can also initiate rough play or increased exercise which can also impact healing. We strongly recommend that animals are separated for the full 7 to 10 days in a quiet room with low furniture (prevent jumping) unless they are being watched closely.

My dog goes to doggy day care during the day while I'm at work, can they still go while they're healing?

We would recommend you not bring your animal to a doggy daycare during the recovery period unless they can provide a clean, isolated (away from other animals), and calm environment. It is important to remember that activity must be restricted, and interactions with other animals makes that much harder. Home is the place where your animal feels safe and comfortable, and the best place for them to heal following a surgery!

Can my pet eat with the cone on?

That will depend on the bowls/ feeding set-up you have for your pet and the size of cone he/she required. The easiest answer is to monitor your pet in their first few feedings and see how they do. If the cone is too large, causing them to not reach the kibble then raising the bowl on a platform or using a smaller bowl can be an easy solution. If your animal has designated meal times, allow them to eat with their cone off under supervision.

My pet's cone keeps coming off, what can I do? I've tried all of your suggestions and still can't keep the cone on, now what?

Unfortunately e-collars don't work for every patient and some need alternatives. These are our suggestions to protect the incision:

- Ensure the e-collar is secured with a collar that has been tightened to allow for only 2 fingers' width of space between the neck and collar. (The temporary gauze used in-clinic may not be strong enough to keep the e-collar secure)
- If the e-collar is too wide (larger than 2 fingers worth space at the tightest setting) it can be cut to create a narrower opening.
- If the patient is too agitated with the plastic cone, or has destroyed it, there are other cone options: fabric, inflatable or more durable plastic ones that can be purchased at a local pet store or veterinary clinic. If you bring your pet with you to your veterinarian, the staff will be able to assist you in finding the right size and fit.
- Pet T-shirts for females can also protect the incision but it's important to find a breathable material that is not too tight and does not rub against the incision. There are medical shirts specifically designed for this that might be carried by your local veterinarian.

Helpful articles:

<http://trupanion.com/blog/2014/06/7-alternatives-cone-shame/>

Will my cat be able to use their litter box with their cone on?

Deep litterboxes or those with hoods can sometimes be difficult for pets to maneuver around to access their litterbox. Removing the hood and purchasing a temporary shallow litterbox should help. If you find your pet is still having difficulty, allow them to keep the cone off for a few hours under supervision, which should make them comfortable enough to use the litterbox. Often it takes a few days for them to adjust to the cone, but after that they should be able to get around without problems (pets are quick learners and adaptable!)

3C. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – EXERCISE LIMITATION

My apartment is on an upper floor with no elevator, is it ok for my pet to walk up a flight of stairs?

Stairs should be limited to only a few steps and when possible we recommend carrying your animal if you have to walk up multiple flights. If that is not an option we recommend you slowly walk your animal up the stairs allowing them to take their time and ensuring they are not jumping or running. Excessive exercise or jumping can cause strain on the sutures resulting in poor healing or in the worst case an opening of the incision. If you have a very energetic pet we recommend you seek boarding with a friend or at a facility with no stairs.

My cat has a cat tree she likes to climb, is she safe to use it when she's healing?

Unfortunately we are going to recommend to put away that favourite tree/perch for the full 7-10 day recovery period. Cat trees often require large leaps to access the perches which we want to avoid, as it puts additional tension/stress on the incision area.

My puppy/kitten has tons of energy, how am I supposed to keep them quiet over the next few days?

Puppy and kitten recovery is admittedly challenging. The key is to remove any tall furniture they can climb up on and limit the toys available to things that won't cause them to run or jump - like a ball or laser pointer etc. Confining to a large dog crate or small room might be the easiest solution to limit the distance they are able to run/play. Keep children away and make sure to keep your energy and voice quiet and relaxing. Remember their long-term health is more important than the short recovery period in which they will need to stay quiet.

My dog and I enjoy long walks/visiting the dog park, can we still do that during the 7-10 days recovery period?

No. During this period you should keep your dog confined to very short leash walks (in the backyard or around the block) and maintain a very calm/quiet pace. If your pet is able to recover completely after the 7-10 days due to vigilant exercise reduction, then you can quickly return to the normal routine of frequenting dog parks and long walks! (If you allow your dog to walk unsupervised, or participate in strenuous exercise, then the recovery time is often extended due to complications, making your pet wait even longer for those beloved activities).

3D. POST- OPERATIVE CARE – TRANSPORTION

Is it safe for me to carry my animal? What is the proper way to hold them?

Yes, you can safely pick up your animal after surgery, but please note they may be a bit lethargic and sensitive after the procedure. If your animal does not like to be held, don't take extra effort to lift them to inspect the incision. You can safely observe when they are sleeping or lying down – less stressful for both you and your pet. The important thing when considering technique to lift your animal is to avoid touching or placing extra tension the incision area, so for females you want to avoid touching and stretching the abdomen, and for males avoid touching the hind end (where the scrotum is).

Is it ok for my animal to jump up into the car? Or truck?

No. We strongly recommend you pick up your animal (with assistance if you have a large animal) to safely and quietly put them in the vehicle. Excessive exercise or jumping can cause strain on the sutures resulting in poor healing or in the worst case an opening of the incision.

Can I take my animal on TTC to get home after surgery or do I need to take a cab?

According to the TTC website: "Leashed pets or pets secured in an enclosed container are welcome to travel on the TTC during weekends and weekday off-peak periods - that is before 6:30 a.m.; 10 a.m. to 3:30 pm; after 7 p.m." This should then be okay for dropping off your animal as we require them at our facility by 7:00 a.m., but the trip home would be during peak times. We recommend arranging transportation home with a friend or family member with access to a vehicle, or a taxi, to ensure you are not breaking TTC rules and so your pet does not experience increased stress on the trip home after surgery.

https://www.ttc.ca/Riding_the_TTC/Frequently_Asked_Questions/Service_Information.jsp

When is it safe to travel with my pet after surgery? (in the car, flight, etc.)

We would strongly recommend that you schedule the surgical appointment around travel needs and ensure that 7-10 days following the appointment your pet can recover at home and limit possible sources of stress. Car rides are okay but ideally should be limited to short trips, and flights should ideally not be schedule until 2 weeks post-surgery. The biggest thing to consider is the stress associated with traveling as stress can negatively impact your pet's recovery.

3E. POST-OPERATIVE CARE – CLEANING

What happens if it's really slushy or rainy outside and my pet's incision gets dirty? Should I wash it?

Keeping your pet clean is definitely important in ensuring the incision heals without infection. If it is raining or slushy we recommend you take your pet outside only for a brief walk to allow them to have a bowel movement. Try to avoid puddles and snowy areas by keeping them on leash and isolated to only shoveled or covered areas. In the event your animal gets dirty please only spot clean the dirty areas. This is likely only the paws so wash those with a warm washcloth or pour water from a jug on the paws only. If the incision is dirty you will need to clean it with an antibacterial wash called "Betadine/Povidone iodine" (you can purchase a small bottle from your veterinarian or see if they can clean the incision for you), being careful to gently remove dirt and only pat dry.

My pet has poop on him/her after surgery, should I wash the area to keep it clean?

Spot cleaning the soiled areas is fine, but you should still avoid the incision area. If there is stool on the incision then it will need to be cleaned as this can cause infection and prevent healing. You will need to clean the incision with an antibacterial wash called "Betadine/Povidone iodine" (you can purchase a small bottle from your veterinarian or see if they can clean the incision for you) being careful to gently remove the stool and only pat dry.

Should I change the type of litter they use?

Dust-free litter is always recommended for any surgical incision that might come in close contact with litter material (to prevent infection). As our surgical incisions are small it's not mandatory to switch your cat's litter – especially if they are picky about changes in litter material (yes, cats often have a preference!). If your cat likes to dig excessively, roll, or lay in the litterbox, then switching temporarily to a dust free litter is strongly recommended. "Yesterday's News" is a dust free, recycled newspaper pellet litter that is available in most pet stores.

<http://www.yesterdaysnews.com/>

My cat likes to hide under the bed, will that make her incision infected because of the dust?

If your cat likes to hide in dark small spaces (which is quite common for cats, especially if they aren't feeling normal), we recommend you complete a big deep clean BEFORE the scheduled procedure (we don't want to add any further stress by vacuuming and rearranging furniture in the recovery period, as stress can impact their ability to heal). Dust can introduce foreign bodies or bacteria to the incision area resulting in infection, so it's important to get down to your pet's level and seek out potential areas that might need an extra clean.