

Caring for Your Cat or Dog After Surgery

June 2010

Thank you for spaying/neutering your cat/dog. You have just helped to decrease the potential number of homeless animals in New York City! Although spays and neuters are common procedures, please remember that your pet has just gone through surgery and needs appropriate care to properly recover, including a clean, warm, and dry place indoors to rest.

Note: The postoperative care line can be reached at (877) SPAY-NYC, (877) 772-9692. If you have any questions or concerns after your pet has had surgery, call this number and choose the option that allows you to speak to a Client Services Representative.

Anesthesia and Surgery

Monitor your pet for any signs of abnormal recovery from anesthesia and/or surgery. These may include:

- Bleeding
- Lethargy, depression, or weakness
- Loss of appetite/decreased water intake
- Shivering
- Increased or decreased body temperature (cool or warm to the touch)
- Unsteady gait
- Pale gums
- Labored breathing
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

If any of these signs occur, call the postoperative care line.

Vaccinations

If the cat received vaccinations, monitor the site of vaccination (shoulder/hind leg) and check for the following additional signs:

- Swelling of face
- Hives
- Limping
- Drooling
- Itchiness
- Pain or swelling at vaccination site (shoulder/hind leg)

If any of these signs occur, call the postoperative care line.

Food and Water

Approximately half your pet's normal serving of food and water should be offered about two hours after returning home from surgery.

If your pet is under 16 weeks of age, feed him/her approximately half the normal amount of food and water as soon as you return home. If your puppy or kitten will not eat when he/she returns home and you can do the following **without risk of being bitten or scratched**, rub maple or Karo Syrup on the pet's gums. To do this, put a small amount of syrup on a cotton-tipped applicator and rub it on the animal's upper gums.

Keep in mind that many pets will not eat on the night they return home from surgery. If the animal does not eat on the evening following surgery, give him/her food and water as you ordinarily would on

the day following surgery.

If your animal vomits after eating on the night of surgery, take the food away and leave only a small amount of water available to the animal. Offer a small amount of food the next morning. If vomiting continues or diarrhea begins, call the postoperative care line.

Do not remove your pet's E-collar for feeding unless you are able to supervise while the E-collar is off. If you do remove it for meals, replace the E-collar immediately after your pet is finished eating.

Pain Medication

Your pet was given long-acting pain medication in conjunction with the spay/neuter surgery. **DO NOT GIVE HUMAN MEDICATION TO YOUR PET.** It is dangerous and can be fatal. If you were given medication to administer to the animal at home, give as directed.

Surgery Site

There are no stitches on the outside of the surgery site. All stitches are underneath the skin. These stitches dissolve, so there is no need to return to the Mobile Spay/Neuter Clinic for removal. The two sides of the incision are also adhered with medical grade glue.

The surgery site on a male cat is so small that it does not need to be closed with stitches or medical grade glue. It is acceptable to see one or two small openings on the scrotum.

If your animal easily allows, check the surgery site daily to make sure that it is healing. What you see on the day the animal is released from surgery is considered to be normal appearance for the surgical site.

If the surgery site is very red, has green/yellow or reddish discharge, has a bad odor, has something sticking out from it, is warm to the touch, or has bruising or a bump that seems to be growing, contact the postoperative care line.

Do not apply any products to the surgery site unless recommended by staff members of the Mobile Spay/Neuter Clinic.

Tattoo

Animals who have had surgery receive a small green tattoo. For female dogs and cats as well as male dogs, the tattoo is placed alongside the surgical incision. For male cats, the tattoo is placed on the lower part of the abdomen near where the spay incision would be on a female cat. No complications from the tattoo are expected, as sterile instruments are used to create it. However, if the tattoo site is contaminated, infection could occur, so please monitor the tattoo site for redness, swelling, or discharge. If these occur, please contact the postoperative care line.

Licking the Surgery Site

Prevent your pet from licking the surgery site as licking at the incision can cause a painful infection. Your pet's E-collar should prevent him/her from licking. Please use the E-collar for seven to 10 days after surgery. If your pet is still able to lick the surgery site while wearing the E-collar, contact the postoperative care line.

Jumping and Playing

Restrict jumping and playing for seven days after surgery. Too much activity can cause the surgery site to open or become swollen. To help keep your pet from being too active:

- Place your pet in an adequately sized carrier, kennel, crate, or small room when you're not able to supervise him/her. The animal must be able to stand up and turn around in the housing unit.
- If your pet is small, carry him/her up and down stairs.
- Walk your pet on-leash to allow him/her to go to the bathroom. Do not take your pet for long walks or allow him/her to roughhouse with other animals or people. Also, do not allow your pet to jump on or off furniture.

Keep Your Pet Away from Other Animals

Keep neutered males away from unspayed females. **Neutered males can get an unspayed female pregnant for up to 30 days after spay/neuter surgery.** Keep spayed females away from unneutered males who may wish to mount them. Animals returning from the Mobile Spay/Neuter Clinic may also smell different to other animals in the household. This can cause the animals to fight, so be prepared to keep your pets in separate areas for a few days following surgery.

Bathroom Habits

Contact the postoperative care line if a cat is not regularly urinating or defecating, or is straining to urinate or defecate within 72 hours after spay/neuter surgery.

Monitor your pet's urine for blood. A small amount may be present in female animals during the first 24 hours after surgery. If this continues or if your pet seems otherwise ill at any time, call the postoperative care line.

Microchips

If your pet received a microchip, do not brush, groom, bathe, or pet him/her excessively in the area of the microchip implant (near shoulders) for the first 24 hours after he/she arrives back home. Do not allow your pet to roughhouse with other animals or people.

Bathing Your Pet

If you wish to bathe your pet, wait until 10 days after surgery. Bathing your pet before this time can cause the surgery site to open and delay healing.

Especially for Cats

Cat Litter for Male Cats

Litter dust can get into the surgery site and cause an infection. Shredded paper, a brand of litter called Yesterday's News (can be purchased at pet stores), or uncooked, long-grain rice should be used in the litter box for at least a week after surgery.

Housing

Helping your cat feel safe and comfortable is important to the recovery process.

- Place your cat in a quiet confined area such as a bathroom, laundry room, or kitchen and turn lights off.
- Provide fresh food/water and clean litter box.
- Keep in mind that cats may hide after surgery. It is a good idea to block access to all places where your cat could hide. This will allow you to more easily monitor the cat during recovery.

Behavior

Spaying or neutering your pet can reduce or eliminate certain undesirable behaviors, such as urine marking, mounting, aggression, or spraying, but these behaviors may have already been learned and

might not go away completely. If these behaviors do go away, they might do so gradually:

- It may take up to 30 days for male cats to stop spraying and for female cats to stop showing signs of heat.
- Older male cats may continue to spray, but their urine will not smell as bad.
- Older female cats may continue to show signs of heat for a few days (howling, crying), but they can no longer get pregnant.

Other Signs

If any other abnormal or concerning signs occur that may be related to surgery or anesthesia, contact the postoperative care line. Please be advised that if an animal's illness or injury is not related to the surgery, the ASPCA will not be responsible for costs associated with care. In addition, if postoperative instructions were not followed, the cost of the re-check appointment and care may not be covered by the ASPCA. **Prior to seeking any veterinary care for a cat with a postoperative complication, you must contact the postoperative care line, which is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.**