

Caring for Your Pet After Surgery

- After your pet has surgery, it is important to strictly follow your veterinarian's recommendations for rehabilitation and recovery.
- Before you leave the hospital, ensure that you understand all of your veterinarian's instructions.
- Some swelling will be normal immediately after surgery, but watch the surgery site carefully for any signs of oozing, odors, heat, pain, or redness.
- It is critical to keep all of your pet's recommended follow-up appointments so that your veterinarian can monitor your pet's progress.

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The type of surgery that your pet undergoes determines the in-hospital recovery time and when you will be able to pick up your pet. Because the period immediately following surgery is when most complications occur, it is important to follow your veterinarian's suggestion for when to pick up your pet. If you would like to visit your pet in the hospital, ask your veterinarian if that would be okay.

After your pet has surgery, it is important to strictly follow your veterinarian's recommendations for rehabilitation and recovery. Doing so can help your pet recover fully. In some cases, following recommendations may mean the difference between life and death. For example, a surgical site that fails to heal due to reinjury or infection, such as a joint replacement or fracture repair, can leave a veterinary surgeon with few treatment options.

Before You Leave the Practice

When your pet is ready to be released (discharged) from the hospital, you'll be given instructions for at-home care. You'll also be told when to return for a follow-up examination or to have sutures removed; you can make the appointment before you leave. Before you leave the hospital, make sure that you understand all of your veterinarian's instructions. Ask to review them with a veterinary technician if you have questions. If you're unsure of something, such as how to administer a medication, your pet might sense this and become difficult to handle; but if you're confident and calm, your pet will likely be easier to handle. If you don't think that you will be able to carry out a particular part of your pet's at-home care, ask your practice what kind of out-patient support they can provide. Find out what the practice's procedures are for after-hours help if there is a problem.

We're Home! Now What?

Carefully follow all of your veterinarian's at-home instructions.

Recognize that your pet may still be feeling the effects of anesthesia and may be unsteady on his or her feet even hours after the procedure. Initially keep him or her in a quiet and contained place if necessary. Although your pet might want to return

Keeping Your Crated Pet—and Yourself—Sane

It's hard to know whether crate rest is harder on the pet or the owner. This can be a trying time, but no matter how "sad" or how much "better" your pet seems to be, it is vitally important to observe all of your veterinarian's restrictions. You can make the time go faster for your pet by keeping him or her occupied with plenty of toys and an occasional low-calorie treat; turning on a radio or television for company sometimes works well. Daily grooming can also be a welcome distraction for some pets. You can help keep your pet entertained by placing your pet's crate in a high-traffic area where he or she can watch the household's activity. If your pet is easily agitated, you might prefer to keep the crate in a quiet room to reduce stress.

For cats, a large dog crate with a small litter pan inside may provide adequate containment. Be sure to cover the slippery plastic floor with an inexpensive nonslip rug.

Home Care

to his or her regular routine, you need to ensure that your pet gets adequate rest.

Pets recovering from surgery should be allowed outdoors only to urinate or defecate. When taking your pet outdoors for bathroom breaks, keep him or her on a leash at all times; follow your veterinarian's instructions regarding whether you should attach the leash to a collar or harness. Ask your veterinarian to show you the best way to lift or support your pet when it is required.

If your pet is receiving medication (especially pain medication), his or her reflexes may be slow, so try to restrict your pet's activity to prevent injury; for example, your pet should avoid stairs and slippery floors. Keep your pet in a safe area and ensure that he or she receives all the medication that your veterinarian prescribed. "Crate rest"—that is, keeping your pet in an appropriately sized crate to restrict activity—may be recommended. *See the box for tips on managing this kind of care.*

Supervise your pet's eating and drinking. Provide food and water in small amounts until you are sure your pet is back to normal. Follow all instructions for special nutritional requirements.

Make sure that your pet is urinating and defecating as expected. Be aware that some pets, especially if they have been given fluids during surgery or hospitalization, may need more frequent bathroom breaks.

Monitoring Surgical Sites

Some swelling will be normal immediately after surgery, but watch the surgery site carefully for any signs of oozing, odors, heat, pain, excessive bruising, or redness. Do not allow your pet to scratch or chew at

the sutures or bandage. An Elizabethan collar—also known as an "e" collar—may be necessary to prevent your pet from chewing the wound. If something doesn't look right, call your veterinarian immediately.

Recovery Times

Typically, full recovery from an extensive orthopedic surgery, such as total hip replacement, takes at least 2 to 3 months. Some dogs require 6 months of careful monitoring and rehabilitation before they reach optimal recovery. Other, less invasive surgeries, such as neutering or ovariohysterectomy (spaying), may require only a matter of days or weeks for recovery.

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Follow Up

It is critical to keep all of your pet's recommended follow-up appointments so that your veterinarian can monitor your pet's progress. If sutures were used, your veterinarian may need to remove them. If a cast was placed, your veterinarian will want to check it periodically and eventually remove it. Radiographs ("x-rays") or other tests may be scheduled to assess healing.

Physical therapy, including massage and hydrotherapy, may also be helpful to your pet's recovery and may be prescribed.