

Spay & Neuter

Post Surgery Recovery

Your pet has just come home from surgery . . . what now? How necessary is that “cone of shame?”

Please take a moment to review this to clarify some post-surgical concerns that pet parents often raise during the post-surgical healing period.

Please note: this post contains graphic images of open incisions and infected surgical sites, which are potential consequences of poor surgical site maintenance.



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What Should I expect now my pet is home?

During the first 24 hours of recovery, your pet will likely be tired and may have a decreased appetite. Some pets have not have their usual bowel movement in the evening due to fasting prior to anesthesia. Some pets may not have their usual bowel movement after 24 hours. Contact your veterinarian if your pet is vomiting, experiencing diarrhea, is painful despite pain medication, or continues to have a reduced appetite. Your veterinarian may need to reassess your pet, prescribe additional treatments or medications to help your pet have a smooth recovery.





**Does my pet need to wear an E-collar?
He doesn't like it! How will she eat or
sleep?**

An Elizabethan collar, or E-collar, is necessary for most pets recovering from surgery. Depending on where the healing incisions are, an E-collar prevents your pet from licking or scratching at those incisions, potentially removing sutures, opening incisions and introducing infection to the site. This is especially important for abdominal surgeries such as routine spay surgeries; if this site is opened, infection can be seeded deep into the abdomen, possibly requiring an additional surgery to repair the wound and antibiotics to fight off infection in the abdomen.

Your pet's E-collar is sized appropriately by your veterinary team to ensure that your pet cannot reach their incision when the cone is used correctly. Most pets adapt very well to their E-collars. To help your pet eat while wearing the collar, you can temporarily use smaller bowls that will fit beneath the cone. Otherwise, with the allure of a tasty meal most pets seem to make it work! Cutting the E-collar to a shorter length allows the pet to access their surgical incision. If you are concerned that your pet is uncomfortable with their E-collar, speak to your veterinarian prior to attempting alternatives to an E-collar.

Are there alternatives to E-collars?

While alternatives exist to the traditional plastic E-collar, they are often inappropriate for most patients. Inflatable or soft fabric collars can be maneuvered by your pet to allow them to access their surgical sites. Some pets can simply pop their inflatable collars off entirely. As a result, veterinarians generally do not regularly recommend these collars for post-surgical recovery as they do not protect the integrity of surgical incisions.



Sometimes, veterinary staff may recommend a “onesie” or t-shirt as a suitable alternative for some pets based on the location of the incision and the energy level of the pet, or if an E-collar would otherwise sit directly on an incision (for example, a lump removed from the neck may have a large incision in the area that an E-collar would normally sit). Your veterinarian will be able to assess whether an alternative to a traditional E-collar is appropriate for your pet.

+ What should I be looking for in a surgical site that is healing well?

A healing surgical site will appear pink, without redness, noticeable swelling, odour or discharge. There may be some scabbing at the site. Some incisions will be closed with visible external sutures or staples while others are closed internally using sutures just under the skin. External sutures and skin staples require removal by veterinary teams, often 10 to 14 days after the surgery date.

Note the limited redness and smooth healing of this spay incision.



Possible Complications

Here are some images of incisions that pets licked or scratched at during the healing process

We will make every reasonable effort to treat complications resulting from your pet's surgery.



An infected spay site. Note the large amount of swelling, the open incision and green discharge in the incision.



This site is almost completely opened, with one skin suture remaining. The site is inflamed and infected, with green discharge.



This is an example pic of a spay incision we should be contacted about.

+ Is there anything I can do to help my pet recover smoothly?

Yes! Following the instructions of your veterinarian by administering pain medication, keeping preventative devices like E-collars in place and monitoring your pet's activity level, eating and water intake can all be beneficial in terms of helping your pet recover well. Keeping your pets calm and quiet and preventing rough-housing with other animals will help keep surgical sites intact.

Cats should not be allowed to jump up on high surfaces which creates tension on healing incisions and dogs should only be walked outdoors on a leash to use the bathroom. While your dog may be adjusting to the cone or your cat may seem bored in their room without furniture to jump on, remember: a little discomfort for 10 to 14 days, which is the typical recovery period, goes a long way! Allowing your pet to return to normal activity or access their surgical site delays healing and can lead to a second surgery to fix damage done to their surgical site.





The first 24 hours post-surgery

- Allow your pet to recover in a quiet, safe place indoors.
- Be aware that your pet's behavior may be slightly altered in the first 24 hours after surgery. For example, they may be glassy-eyed, sleepy, nauseous, wobbly, vocal, shivering, or irritable.
- Encourage frequent movement indoors to help your pet recover from the anesthesia. Allowing them to rest uninterrupted will result in longer recovery and potential complications.
- Offer small amounts of the food they eat regularly and water later in the evening. Your pet may feel nauseous, and it can take up to 48 hours for their appetite to return to normal.
- You may notice your pet received a small green tattoo, indicating they've been sterilized. This tattoo is not an extra incision and does not require cleaning.



10-14 days following surgery

- Your pet should be closely supervised and on an exercise restriction for the next 10-14 days. Keep your pet quiet as quiet as possible during the first two weeks. Avoid running, jumping, and excessive playing. Strenuous activity increases your pet's risk of developing swelling around the incision site that could result in premature dissolving of sutures, opening of the incision, and costly medical care that would be your responsibility.
- Keep the incision dry. No bathing, swimming, or playing in deep snow.
- Check the incision twice daily until healed.

A small amount of blood is normal immediately after surgery.

Some redness and swelling of the incision is expected and normal.

- Do not allow your pet to lick, scratch, or chew the incision. If this occurs, an E-collar must be used to help prevent potentially serious post-operative complications.
- Male dogs and cats can still impregnate an unsterilized female up to one month after surgery. Please keep a close eye on your pet.



Issues that require attention, but are not an emergency

- Significant swelling at the surgical incision
- Colored discharge from the incision
- Pale gums
- Not returning to eating or drinking days after surgery
- Intermittent vomiting for days after surgery
- Slight gaps at the spay incision (females only)
- Swollen painful scrotum (males only) days after surgery



Female cats will need lots of rest

If you have multiple cats, it's best to separate any female spayed cat(s) from the group during her recovery.

Settle your cat in a wire crate (large enough to hold food, water, and a litterbox) or in a bathroom. There's no need to let her walk around and explore, because actions like running and jumping risk opening up the incision.

As long as there is ample room in the cage for your cat to do her feline stretches and use her litter box, it's perfectly fine.

Your spayed cat should ideally rest for 7 days.

Provide food in small, frequent meals

An hour after your cat comes home, you can give $\frac{1}{4}$ of your cat's normal food portion. We usually wait another 1 to 2 hours before giving them another $\frac{1}{4}$.

Provide small, frequent meals over the next 7 days. Avoid changing your cat's food abruptly during this period.

Tip #1: If your cat has a sensitive stomach, cut their daily food intake by 25% for the first 3 days before going back to the normal amount.

Tip #2: I find that homecooked chicken broth helps boost my cats' energy. Boil some deboned chicken in water, then tear them into bite-sized pieces for cats. A bland recipe for humans, but cats love freshly cooked food!

In the first 12 hours, your cat will likely be woozy, slow and quiet due to anesthetic effects.

Her pupils may also be in a slightly dilated state.

Your cat should slowly go back to her normal self over the next few days

Do not bathe your cat or get them wet for 14 days. Cats are typically self-cleaning.

After spaying, a thin layer of fur will start to grow within 1 to 2 weeks.

To achieve full fluff, it takes around 6 weeks..



Emergency issues after surgery

Please take your pet to a local, 24-hour emergency clinic if you see any of the following:

- Consistent flow of blood from surgical incision
- Consistent vomiting that won't stop
- Difficulty breathing
- Not waking up or inability to stand

Please remember you will be responsible for any costs incurred if your pet is treated at one of these locations.





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Questions?

Please call: (615) 790-5590