

Your cat is having an operation

Most cats will have at least one operation during their lives for neutering; others may have to come into the veterinary practice for other types of investigation, operations or dental work which require a general anaesthetic.

THIS IS A GENERAL GUIDE to the procedure and some advice on how to make sure that cats returning home to other cats integrate successfully back into the family after a stay in a veterinary practice.

The night before surgery

Anaesthetics are safest when the stomach is empty, so do not feed your cat in the late evening before the operation (your vet will specify from exactly when) and keep it indoors so that it cannot get food elsewhere (a litter tray may be appreciated). You do not need to restrict your cat's access to water unless told to by your vet.

The morning of the operation

Don't let your cat out on the morning of surgery in case it doesn't return! Transport your cat in a secure cat basket (see leaflet 'Bringing your cat to the vet' (or go to www.fabcats.org). Your cat will be admitted to the hospital and checked to ensure that all is well before the operation and you will be asked to sign a consent form. This is a good time to ask questions or raise any concerns you may have and to find out when you can phone for an update or take your cat home. Ensure the practice has your most up-to-date contact information or mobile number.

After the operation

Your cat will be kept in for at least a few hours after the operation until it has recovered from the anaesthetic. Some cats, eg, those having more serious operations or with other illnesses, may need to stay in for several days. Your practice will have a policy on visiting hospitalised cats and/or providing food, beds and so on for your cat while there.

Returning home

If your cat returns home on the day of an operation, it is



likely to be a little quiet and may be a bit unsteady on its feet. It may have a clipped area of skin and skin stitches. It is important that:

- Your cat does not lick the operation site or pull out any stitches. If this happens contact your vet who may provide you with an Elizabethan collar for the cat.
- The wound is not red, swollen or oozy. If you are worried contact your vet.
- Any medication is given as instructed and that the course is completed.

Painkillers will already have been given and you may receive more to give your cat at home. Pain can be difficult to recognise in cats but signs can include loss of appetite, hiding or being withdrawn. If you experience problems administering medication or have any concerns about your cat then you should contact your vet for advice.

Depending on the operation performed, your vet will probably advise that you keep your cat indoors for at least

the first night. Your cat will appreciate a quiet, warm place to convalesce with food, water and a litter tray (keep the food and litter tray apart).

Your cat may be reluctant to eat on the first night at home. Gently warming the food (to no warmer than body temperature), feeding by hand and offering tempting foods (eg, poached chicken or fish) may encourage eating. See also FAB's leaflet on 'Feeding a poorly cat'. Special convalescent diets are available from most veterinary practices. Your vet will advise you if your cat has special dietary needs. Cats that are unwell or convalescing often do not feel up to grooming and may appreciate time spent stroking and grooming them.

Post-operative checks

Your vet will probably ask you to return for at least one post-operative check in the days following the surgery. If you have any concerns about your cat before the time of the check-up then you should contact your vet straight away. Stitches are generally removed 10 days after surgery.

Maintaining good cat relationships

Your cat may well feel groggy and disorientated on its return home and will have picked up 'foreign' odours in the veterinary surgery. Scent is amazingly important for cats and a change of smell can lead to strained cat relationships. The returning cat may be perceived by cats left at home as an intruder and a potential threat. This is not an uncommon scenario.

You can try and minimise potential problems by:

- Putting some bedding in the carrier for the return home which smells of home/you.
- Using Feliway (available from your vet) in your home.
- Keeping cats apart initially so that the returning cat gets a chance to pick up the smell of home again.
- Mixing their scents by stroking one and then the other, especially around the head area.
- Supervising re-introductions and carefully gauging the cats' responses.
- Not overwhelming the cat with attention from people, dogs or other cats.
- Letting the cat initiate close contact, but talk to it and gently stroke or groom.

If there have previously been relationship difficulties between the cats, or if the reaction of the cats that stayed at home is negative, it is advisable to isolate the returning cat and effect social re-introductions as described in the FAB information leaflet 'Introducing your cat to other cats and dogs' on www.fabcats.org.

www.fabcats.org

FAB's full range of Cat Friendly Practice leaflets

- Bringing your cat to the vet*
- Giving medicine to your cat*
- Feeding a poorly cat*
- Your cat is having an operation*
- Preventing health problems*
- Insuring your cat*
- Choosing a boarding cattery*
- Common household poisons and cats*
- Why do cats..?*

For more information on cat care
www.fabcats.org

The Feline Advisory Bureau (FAB)

Set up almost 50 years ago, FAB's work now provides essential information for cat owners and expert information for people working with cats such as veterinary surgeons, breeders, cattery owners and rescue centres. Through our feline expert panel (a group of veterinary surgeons funded by FAB to specialise in feline care at UK veterinary universities) FAB has gathered a wealth of information on both common and rare conditions.

We're not just interested in veterinary treatment; our experts understand that a cat's home environment and lifestyle can have a huge influence on its health and well being. FAB is interested in the whole cat! The more owners understand cats and their behaviour the better they will be at spotting problems and giving TLC when a cat needs it most.

For over 400 pages of information on cat care go to FAB's website. We're already helping over 1 million cat owners a year.

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