

Consumer Guide to Elective Surgery

Thank you for recognizing the need to spay or neuter your pet. Many people "shop around" for the best price on this surgery, without the knowledge of why the cost can vary widely among veterinary practices. This guide was created to help you find the best fit between the veterinary practice and your expectations for the care of your pet.

To make an informed decision, there are questions you should ask about how the procedure is performed. You need to be completely comfortable with the level of care provided, not just the cost.

The following are some of the questions you should ask.

Will my pet receive a complete physical prior to surgery?

It is important for the veterinarian to perform a physical for a number of reasons. It is our first defense against performing surgery on an animal that may have infectious disease, a heart murmur, or be debilitated from parasites.

Will blood work be run before my pet has a general anesthetic?

It is always best to run a pre-anesthetic blood profile. This basic blood work can reveal problems with organ function that might not otherwise be obvious. Anesthetic protocols can then be adjusted to better suit the individual needs of the pet. Or, the procedure may be postponed until the problem can be resolved or at least improved.

What safety precautions will be taken during surgery?

While most surgery is uneventful, emergencies do arise. Prompt detection of impending problems greatly aids our ability to intervene early and correct the problem.

- A breathing tube (endotracheal tube) should be placed in all anesthetized animals. This keeps the airway open and allows for oxygen and gas anesthesia to be delivered to the patient as needed.
- An I.V. catheter should be placed before surgery, and fluids should be run during surgery and until the patient is fully awake and recovered. The I.V. fluids help keep the blood pressure stable, speed recovery and allow for rapid administration of emergency medication should it become necessary. It is always better to have an I.V. line available and not need it than to need it and not have it.
- A pulse oximeter is a monitor that allows the surgeon to keep track of the heart rate and rhythm, as well as the amount of oxygen in the blood. It has an audio signal to which the surgeon can listen and a digital display that gives exact measurements of pulse and blood oxygen level.
- Surgery patients lose body heat through anesthesia and the opening of body cavities. If a patient gets too cold, the heart can be affected. A recirculating warm water blanket under the patient keeps the body temperature from falling below normal.
- Finally, having a nurse present in the operating room is also a good idea. This trained professional can watch monitors and the patient, allowing the surgeon to concentrate on the procedure being done.

What safety precautions will be taken with my pet after surgery?

Patients need to be monitored closely after surgery. A nurse should take the pet's temperature at regular intervals after surgery and supplemental heat should be provided as needed. Your pet's gum color, pulse and respirations should be monitored as well.

How will pain be controlled?

This is very important - Surgery hurts! The anesthetic will not provide pain control once the pet wakes up. Injectable pain medication should be given when the pet wakes up and oral medication should be offered to go home.

What post surgical care instructions will I receive for my pet?

Aftercare of surgical patients is very important for proper healing. The hospital should provide written discharge instructions for your pet so that you have them to refer to.

What else might I need to know about?

An Elizabethan collar should be sent home with most dogs after surgery to keep them from licking or chewing the surgical site. Some cats also require them.



***Surgery should be approached with the same degree of care and caution
whether performed on people or on animals.***