
GENERAL ANAESTHESIA IN DOGS, CATS AND FERRETS

What is general anaesthesia?

General anaesthesia is the state where the body is completely 'asleep' and unaware of the surroundings, and unable to feel any pain or discomfort. Anaesthetic drugs are given by injection or breathed in, and they stop the brain from receiving signals from the body. Almost all surgery on pets happens under general anaesthesia, and some pets undergoing imaging will have a general anaesthetic to allow them to relax sufficiently to be placed in specific positions.

Your pet's anaesthetic will start with a 'pre-med'. This is an injection of drugs which is tailored to your pet, and which will help your pet to relax, and provide pain relief that will last throughout surgery and afterwards (if needed). Your pet will then be given a short-acting anaesthetic drug to induce sleep, and they will stay asleep by breathing anaesthetic gas. Most pets will have a breathing tube placed down their throat into their windpipe to deliver oxygen and the anaesthetic gas. Some pets may have a face mask rather than a breathing tube.

Pets undergoing surgical procedures will usually receive additional pain relief on top of the drugs in their pre-med. We will choose the best pain relief plan for your pet depending on their surgery.

What are the risks of general anaesthesia?

The vast majority of pets that are anaesthetised do not encounter any problems during or after their procedure. Some pets may develop a tummy upset after the procedure, which can be as a result of the body processing the anaesthetic drugs. This usually resolves within a day or two, if it happens. Very rarely, a pet can have a more serious and unexpected reaction to general anaesthesia, such as a drop in heart rate, a drop in blood pressure, or difficulty breathing, and even more rarely, this can

be fatal. This is more likely to happen with a pet who is already very poorly – however sometimes there is no alternative to general anaesthesia in order to try to save a pet's life.

All pets undergoing anaesthesia at our practice are assessed before their procedure, and sometimes we will recommend additional laboratory tests or treatments to ensure that your pet is well enough to undergo the anaesthetic. The anaesthetic plan is tailored for your pet, and our fully trained staff are monitoring your pet continuously from the moment they go to sleep to the time when they wake up. We monitor your pet's vital signs throughout the anaesthetic (including heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, gum colour, reflexes and temperature), and record these observations every five minutes on an anaesthetic chart. This allows us to pick up any changes as soon as they happen and to react accordingly if there is any concern about how your pet is coping with their general anaesthetic.

How can I look after my pet after he/she gets home?

Your pet may be a little drowsy when he/she gets home. It's best to feed a small meal of bland food such as chicken and rice (unless they are fed a special diet), and provide a calm, quiet space. Dogs can be taken for a brief walk to go to the toilet, and cats should be kept indoors with a litter tray until the following day so they don't get into trouble whilst still feeling sleepy. Some pets can have a cough for a few days, as a result of the breathing tube. This is usually nothing to worry about and should get better over about five days.

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