
SURGERY AND WOUND CARE

What will my pet's surgical procedure involve?

Almost all surgery is carried out under general anaesthesia, to ensure that your pet doesn't feel any pain or stress, and does not move during the procedure. For more information on anaesthesia, see our information sheets on anaesthesia in different species. We can discuss exactly what your pet's surgery involves at your appointment.

What should I expect to see after surgery?

Most surgery sites are closed at the end of surgery with stitches, staples or tissue glue. We will use buried sutures (nothing visible to see) when appropriate, as these are usually the most comfortable for your pet. These are not always the best choice so sometimes there may be visible stitches or staples, which we will usually remove after about 10 to 14 days for mammals and birds, and four weeks for reptiles.

An exception to this is when we are treating an infected wound - in this case we may leave the wound open to drain, to allow any remaining infection to come out rather than staying trapped under the skin. We may suggest that the wound is cleaned or treated regularly, or your pet may have a dressing or bandage that will be changed regularly. It is normal to expect some discharge or ooze from these wounds for a few days.

How long will my pet take to heal?

Most soft tissue surgical wounds in mammals and birds are healed within 10 to 14 days. Reptiles take slightly longer to heal fully – usually around four weeks.

Broken bones and shell repairs can take longer to heal – anywhere from a few weeks to several

months. For more information on recovery from specific types of surgery please ask our vets.

What will I need to do?

Closed wounds should not weep and do not usually need to be cleaned, but you will need to stop your pet from licking, scratching, rubbing or biting at the wound, as this can cause a wound infection, or even open the wound up so it requires further surgery. Swimming and bathing is not allowed until the wound is healed, and dogs and cats should be on limited exercise until they have healed. All pets will need somewhere clean and dry to recuperate, and if your pet normally has bedding of shavings, bark chips or other loose substrate, it is advisable to switch to newspaper in most cases to avoid particles getting in the wound and causing irritation.

Dogs and cats can usually be encouraged not to lick at a wound by using a buster collar. It can be challenging to stop smaller pets such as rats and hamsters from chewing their stitches as they do not usually keep collars or coats on well – we may prescribe medication to these species to try to reduce the chances of them interfering with their wounds. Birds will often tolerate a buster collar whilst they are healing, and reptiles do not often interfere with their surgical wounds. We have a selection of collars, pet shirts and dressings to help keep your pet's surgical wound clean and stop any interference.

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