

Large Procedure Aftercare



Even the smallest of surgeries are invasive, so it is important that pets have time to heal and rest once they get home. In most cases, that means restricting how much activity they engage in. Confinement after surgery allows the tissue that was cut to heal back together.

If a pet moves too much following surgery, there is a risk of the tissues not bonding properly, which can lead to wounds that do not heal or heal too slowly and if this happens, there is also a higher risk for complications like infections.

The type of activity restriction a dog will need post-op is dependent on the type of surgery and the patient. Smaller incisions—often seen with neuters, small mass removals, and some spays—often require seven to ten days of restricted activity, and these patients can often be confined to a small room or pen. Long incisions, incisions in spots that are naturally rubbed on (such as in the arm pit), or incisions in sites that are under a lot of tension (e.g., the forearm or ankle) are trickier. These might require longer (one to two weeks) and stricter activity restrictions to allow proper healing and prevent disturbance of the surgery sites. Major surgeries like bone surgery may require keeping your pet confined for three to six weeks or even longer.

To make confinement as comfortable as possible it is recommended to add bedding or blankets and making sure the enclosure is big enough to allow your pet to stand up and turn around in a full circle.

When it comes to the surgical incision itself, the best course of action is to leave it alone. Pet owners are usually not required to clean an incision, but it is important to keep an eye on it to make sure it is healing properly. Covering an incision when the patient goes outside will help keep it clean but avoid placing any bandage. While bandaging can be helpful in some situations, it can potentially slow down healing if used inappropriately and can cause other sores or lesions.

If you notice the incision getting dirty or crusty, you can clean it gently by wiping or patting the area with a towel and warm water. While a dilute iodine rinse can also be used to clean the incision site, pet owners should stay away from alcohol and peroxide, which can cause pain and delay healing.

Alcohol can sting and has a strong odor, which most animals will try to groom off. Peroxide stings as well, but it also kills the first layer of cells in the incision. Since those are the cells trying to form healing bonds, we want them to stay alive and healthy. An incision that is infected might ooze pus, become very swollen and red, and/or feel hard to the touch. Incisions that feel hot, are painful when touched, or have visible gaps between the wound edges are also cause for concern.

It does not take much for things to go wrong after a surgery if you are not following the vet's recommendations. Pets should not lick, bite, or scratch their incision. If your pet becomes preoccupied with the area, intervene as soon as possible. Get your pet an E-collar, an inflatable cone, or a body suit to prevent damage to the site. Pets can chew and lick their incisions until the sutures fall out and the incision site becomes infected. In these cases, surgical intervention will be needed.