Post Operative Care for Feral or Rescue Cats

Warning: There are some graphic images in this presentation.

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Female Anatomy (from the Hill's Atlas of Veterinary Clinical Anatomy)

Male Anatomy (from the Hill's Atlas of Veterinary Clinical Anatomy)
**Surgical Sites**

Female Cat

Male Cat

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Indicate where incisions will be made

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**Take Home Instructions**

- Review the take home instructions for care after surgery.
- Instructions should touch on the following:
  - Vaccination information
  - When to feed & offer water to the cat
  - Anorexia
  - Pain medication
  - Litter options (if applicable)
  - Bathroom habits of trapped cats
  - Restricting activity
  - Surgery site concerns
  - Vomiting after surgery
Vaccinations

- **FVRCP (Feline Distemper)** – commonly given in the right scapular area.
- **Rabies** – commonly given in the right rear leg, near the hip

- If the cat received vaccinations the day of spay/neuter, monitor for the following:
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Lethargy or Depression
  - Swelling of the face
  - Hives
  - Swelling and/or lumps at vaccination site
  - Vomiting and/or diarrhea
  - Loss of appetite

Food and Water

**When can I first offer the cat food and water after the surgery?**

At pick up, most programs will provide you with a time of day. If not, three to four hours post surgery is a good general timeframe for most cats. Kittens under four months of age are usually fed within an hour of discharge. It is important to note that the cat must be able to stand and walk without appearing “wobbly” before providing food & water – regardless of the recommended timeframe.
Anorexia or Inappetence

What do I do if the cat will not eat after 36 hours?

• Do NOT force feed
• Continue to offer fresh food and water regularly
• Offer highly palatable food
  • Canned food, boiled chicken, chicken baby food (should not contain onion or garlic powder), or fish (tuna, salmon, etc)
• Karo or maple syrup
  • If the cat is friendly, apply a small amount of syrup to your finger and rub it on the cat’s upper gums. If the cat is not friendly, a small amount of the syrup can be added to its water bowl.
• Monitor for lethargy
• Trapped cats
  • Occasionally cats that are in traps will not eat. If no lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, or other signs are noted, the cat will likely resume its eating habits once released.

Pain Medications

Do NOT give the cat any kind of pain medication!

Most programs administer a long-acting pain medication prior to the cat’s discharge. Therefore, the administration of further medication is usually not required. Do not give human medication; it is dangerous and can be fatal to the cat.
Cat Litter

Cats In Traps

Litter dust can get into the surgery site and cause an infection, so do not place litter in traps. Shredded paper or full sheets of newspaper can be used in traps in place of litter.

Cat Litter

Cats NOT In Traps

Female cats: Can have access to regular litter.

Male cats: Provide with litter boxes that contain shredded paper, a brand of litter called Yesterday’s News (can be purchased at a pet store), or uncooked, long-grain rice. Male cats should not have access to regular litter for a full week after surgery.
Urination & Defecation

Cats in Traps
- These cats may not urinate/defecate as they normally would especially if they are eating and drinking very little. This may be related to the stress of surgery/trapping and should return to normal after the cat is released.

Urinary concerns
- If the cat is straining to urinate, vocalizing while urinating or defecating, you notice blood in the urine, severe abdominal pain, or abdominal enlargement, please seek veterinary care immediately.

Restrict Activity

Too much activity can cause the surgery site to open.

- Cover trap
  - Place a sheet over the entire trap so that the cat will have a dark place to rest. Keep the noise and activity level down in the holding facility. Turning out lights may also help the cat feel more comfortable.
Surgical Site

Check the surgery site daily to make sure that it is healing.

If the animal is trapped, remove the papers from the bottom of the trap and raise the trap (with two people) so that the cat's surgical site can be viewed. Allow for extra clearance so that the cat cannot scratch you. Try to get the cat to walk from one end of the trap to the other so the surgical site can be viewed (can rest end of trap on table and alternate which trap end rests on the table to get view of extended body).

-- Avoid stressing the cat. If the cat is highly stressed, stop and try again later.

Normal Post Op Observations

- Presence of a small hard lump under a female cat’s incision may not be problematic. If you are safely able to handle the cat, you can check the area with clean hands. Within the first 24-48 hours, a cool compress applied to the lump can help ease swelling. After that time period, a warm compress should be used to help reduce swelling.

- A small amount of blood may be seen and should not be of concern.

- Male cat's neuter incisions are not sutured or glued closed, so you will likely see two, small incisions – one on each side of the scrotum.
Normal Post Op Observations

**Normal Neuter Incision**

- Incision is open slightly to allow for drainage.
- A small amount of bloody discharge is normal to see within 24 hours post neuter.

**Normal Spay Incision**

- Incision is closed - edges of skin are well adjoined.
- Some programs may use tattoo ink to "mark" an animal as being spayed or neutered.
- A small, firm lump may or may not be considered "normal." Often the lump is a suture knot which is not concerning. Occasionally the lump could be something like a seroma, abscess, or hernia – all of which would require a medical recheck.
Potentially Concerning Post Op Observations

If any of the following are observed, seek veterinary advice:

- Surgery site is open in a female
- Something is sticking out from the surgical site in a male or female
- Green/yellow discharge
- Bad odor
- Anorexia coupled with lethargy
- Active bleeding
- Redness that is getting bigger
- Bruising that is getting bigger
- Lump under incision that is getting bigger

Concerning Post Op Observations

**Surgery Site: female cat**

- Edges of incision do not meet & discharge is observed.
- Large lump is noted under incision.
- Dark bruising.
Concerning Situations

- If the surgery site is persistently bleeding or has signs of infection (such as the presence of redness, swelling, or pus), seek veterinary care as soon as possible.

Other Concerning Observations

**Surgery Site: Post Neuter**

- Tissue protruding from neuter incision
- Purulent discharge
- Self mutilation – half of the scrotum was chewed off
Other Concerning Observations

Surgery Site: Post Spay

- Deep bruising, swelling, and edges of incision are not well adhered.
- Tissue protruding from spay incision
- Bruising that is spreading, and presence of a reducible lump under spay incision

Vomiting

The cat may vomit after surgery

Vomiting in female cats (more than one isolated event) after surgery may lead to recovery complications. If vomiting is observed, contact the program’s post operative care line or a local veterinarian who is willing to work with feral cats. They should be able to help you assess the situation. In male cats that have significant vomiting episodes, there is a risk for dehydration. Medical care should be sought in these situations.
Other Signs?

If other concerning signs occur that may be related to surgery, please contact the program’s post operative care line or a local veterinarian who is willing to work with feral cats.

Additional Resources from ASPCApro.org

Feral Cats
http://www.aspcapro.org/feral-cats.php

Spay Neuter
http://www.aspcapro.org/spayneuter.php