

Logistics of Check-out



PICK-UP TIMES

At drop-off, caretakers are given an estimated pick-up time. While we understand that many people prefer picking up their cats after work, earlier pick-up times help us keep costs down by not having to pay a staff member to stay late. Some caretakers work in pairs and take turns dropping off and picking up, others ask friends to help.

DISCHARGE CRITERIA

Before we discharge a cat, it must be alert and able to lift its head. We prefer that the cats be able to remain sternal on their own. Because our injectable anesthetic cocktail is short acting and lightly dosed, most cats are well recovered before their discharge time. Our primary goal at discharge is that the cat is awake enough to fully recover with no further assistance.

MEDICAL RECORD/POST OP INSTRUCTIONS

When caretakers arrive for pick up, we ascertain that each Medical Record was photocopied onto Post Op Instructions and that no original Medical Record leaves the clinic. Sending home a copy of the Medical Record allows each caretaker to see exactly what was done for each cat and read any comments or observations that we made. Some of the information is noted strictly for our own use. However, other types of medical information and drug doses could be important to the caretaker, if the cat has difficulty recovering or experiences complications after being discharged.

For patients with issues beyond routine, the veterinarian passes instructions and information for the technician to relay to the caretaker. We do not have the caretakers in direct contact with the veterinarian. We verbally review significant medical issues, if we had not called the caretaker earlier in the day.

At the time of discharge, we answer any other questions that come up, if we have the information. Most of the veteran trappers, however, are very experienced and know what to do.

ADDITIONAL VETERINARY ATTENTION

If a cat needs additional veterinary attention or follow up, or could benefit from any medication such as antibiotics, we refer the caretaker to local veterinary clinics. We do not prescribe or dispense any medication and we strongly discourage any treatment without involving a veterinarian.

COLD WEATHER PROTECTION

In cold weather, we worry about cats becoming chilled on their way home. They can stop metabolizing their anesthesia and slip under anesthesia again. We implore caretakers to keep their cats very warm and covered during transport and recovery after discharge. We remind caretakers that if the car temperature is 70 degrees, then it is still 30 degrees colder than the cat's body needs to be. If the cat is unable to maintain its body temperature, then it will become hypothermic even in a warm environment.

FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS

For healthy, adult cats, we recommend waiting to feed them until they are fully awake. That is at least several hours after leaving the clinic. For kittens, cats under four pounds or for thin adult cats, we recommend earlier feedings with more frequent small meals and a full meal on the evening of their surgery.

WHEN TO RELEASE

Recommendations for when to release cats are subjective, extremely variable and often the subject of heated debate. People must use their best judgment and make decisions with respect to their own circumstances. The main point that cannot be argued is that the cat should be fully beyond all effects of anesthesia before being released. Apart from this, the recommendations vary from overnight to a week.

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EMPTY TRAPS

If the cat arrived in a trap but is leaving in a carrier, then we must remember to send home the trap. We do not have room to store traps nor do we have facilities to disinfect traps. Traps left in our clinic may be given to the next person who needs one.

LAST, BUT NOT LEAST

Before sending the cat out the door, we make sure the carrier or trap is fully covered in order to keep the cat calm and maintain warmth. In winter, we may add blankets over the traps to increase the insulation and preserve body heat. We ask caretakers to warm up the inside of their cars before loading cats, and we request they put the highest risk cats in the seat next to them with direct access to heat.

Many caretakers drive long distances, so it is imperative that they cover the cats well to keep them insulated from the cold. In the summer, the opposite problem arises, and the cats must receive enough ventilation to prevent overheating.

WHY DOESN'T THE SURGEON TALK DIRECTLY TO CARETAKERS AT CHECK-OUT?

Our surgeon has a very clear job: to perform high quality, high volume spay/neuter surgeries. After a full day of surgery, the surgeon is ready and entitled to be "done". Any necessary information and instructions are passed along to technicians to relay to caretakers. We ask caretakers to contact their own veterinarians if they need any additional assistance or advice.

WHY DON'T WE SERVE ALL OF FREE-ROAMING CATS' MEDICAL NEEDS?

Besides protecting the limits of our surgeon, we must also protect our relationship with the local veterinary community – this means respecting their relationships with their clients.

We have established ourselves as an organization that focuses on providing high quality, high volume spay/neuter - and nothing else. Local veterinarians have slowly embraced us and supported our efforts. To violate that position by offering other treatments and advice, we would put our community relationship at risk. We believe it is in the cats' best interests for our organization to keep a narrow position in the community and maintain a positive position with local veterinarians.

Furthermore, our donors expect the funds they contributed to be spent on our single mission: spay/neuter. If we were to divert donated dollars to other services, we would be violating our mission and the promise that we make to our donors to fight homelessness through spay/neuter.

HOW WARM IS "VERY WARM" FOR RECOVERY?

A cat's normal body temperature is about 100 degrees. Even if a room is 70 degrees and feels warm to us, the temperature is still 30 degrees colder than the cat!

Body heat is created through muscle movement and heat is retained in the body by fat. So a thin cat that is too sleepy to move around will not be able to generate or retain heat – it cannot keep itself from getting colder. As the cat gets colder, it cannot get rid of its anesthetic, thus, it can become more deeply sedated. As it gets more deeply sedated, it cannot move, cannot make heat and it gets even colder. It is a vicious cycle.

We estimate that "very warm" is about 85 degrees. We needed a number to give to people, because they do not always comprehend the importance of keeping cats warm post surgery. Could we have selected another temperature? Of course. But 85 degrees is our reference.

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WHY DO WE HAVE DIFFERENT FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT CATS FOLLOWING SURGERY?

Maintaining a normal blood glucose (sugar) is an important factor for recovering from anesthesia and surgery. Kittens and cats that are thin have smaller fat reserves and less energy stored in the liver. Thus, they may have difficulty keeping their blood glucose in the normal range. These kittens and cats are also at risk for low body temperature, so besides having less energy available, they may also require more energy to try to maintain their own body temperature. Shivering is nature's way to create body heat, but it uses lots of energy. For these two main reasons, we try to prevent a kitten or thin cat from experiencing low blood sugar by getting food into them as early as it is safe to feed them.

However, there are risks with feeding any animal soon after surgery. Anesthesia slows down and sometimes stops the intestine from moving, so eating before the intestines can move might cause colic (stomach ache) or vomiting. To make matters worse, if a cat vomits that is still a bit drowsy, then it can inhale or aspirate its vomit. This can cause serious respiratory problems and death. Adult cats that have no risk of low blood sugar should not be fed until they are fully awake in order to avoid the complications that might be seen from feeding soon after surgery.

WHAT FACTORS DO WE CONSIDER WHEN ADVISING A CARETAKER WHEN TO RELEASE A CAT?

In the perfect world, all cats would have homes. In the almost perfect world, all homeless cats would have a week in a warm, safe location to recover from surgery. In the real world, we strive for the best and take what we can get. The most important consideration for releasing a cat is that the anesthesia has completely worn off, so that the cat is coordinated, can find its territory, food and shelter and can protect itself, if needed.

Human factors present many of the obstacles for holding cats. Most caretakers don't have the facilities to house free-roaming cats in traps or carriers for more than a day or two after surgery. If we were to require that cats be held for a week after surgery, many people would not trap at all and free-roaming cats would be left unaltered.

In private practice, pet cats are sent home the day after surgery. Thus, releasing a free-roaming cat the day after spay/neuter is not unreasonable. The hesitation to do so may stem from concerns about potential complications. If a pet cat has a complication, then its owners will likely notice and seek veterinary care, if needed. If a free-roaming cat has a complication, its caretaker may not notice, especially if the cat does not return to eat for a day or two. The most likely complications are low appetite and low energy; these usually resolve on their own. Serious complications are rarely seen.

If inclement weather is expected, then it makes sense to hold cats until the worst is past. Our climate is fairly mild compared to other regions of the country. We get little or no snow in the winter. We do not experience hard freezing weather. If cats have shelter from the wind and wetness, whether it is their own or man-made, then they survive through the weather as do the local squirrels, raccoons and other urban wildlife.

Our surgeon is very talented and knowledgeable. Cats are in surgery for under 10 minutes and spay incisions are typically no longer than 1 to 2cm. Recovery from surgery is simpler and less complicated with high quality surgery.

WHICH CATS ARE AT GREATEST RISK AFTER DISCHARGE?

Cats that are less awake after surgery are at higher risk for problems than cats that are more fully awake. Especially if sleepy cats are not kept warm, then their ability to wake up from anesthesia is impaired. Any cats that have difficulty staying warm are at higher risk, as well. This includes kittens, thin adults and cats that became cold during surgery, namely, later term pregnant cats. Cats that were not in great condition prior to surgery are cats that we worry about more than robust, thriving cats.