PRE-PROCEDURE INFORMATION

About Sedation

> Sedation is used for a wide range of procedures and diagnostics, from ultrasounds and X-rays to minor procedures and grooming-related tasks. This page explains how sedation differs from general anesthesia, why it's often recommended, and what to expect.

Sedation vs. General Anesthesia

Sedation is frequently used in veterinary medicine to facilitate procedures or diagnostics, from ultrasounds to minor procedures. Its effect is not as profound as general anesthesia, which removes all consciousness and many reflexes. With sedation, your pet will still have reflexes present and may even remain conscious — but sedation reduces anxiety and stress, which makes handling easier and helps us do a better job with whatever procedure or diagnostic is planned.

Not all sedation protocols are alike. Some protocols just "take the edge off," while your pet remains entirely awake, albeit a little slower on their feet. Other protocols make them very sleepy and unable to walk, but are reversible with another drug once the procedure is over — giving us greater control over how long the sedation lasts. Some sedatives also help with pain relief.

Why We Often Recommend Sedation

One of the most common uses of sedation is with ultrasound and X-rays, especially for larger dogs but also for very anxious or wiggly pets. There are several reasons sedation helps us get a good result:

- **Keeping a wiggly pet still:** Ultrasounds can take 30–45 minutes depending on the study. While non-invasive, it can be too much to ask a pet to hold still while lying on their back for that long.
- **Getting clear, diagnostic X-rays:** X-rays taken of a wiggly, panting, or distressed pet are often blurry and low-quality, sometimes to the point of being impossible to interpret. A calm, still pet means clearer images and a more accurate read the first time, without needing to repeat the X-ray.
- **Reducing panting and air-swallowing:** Structures like the stomach and intestines are impossible to evaluate with ultrasound when filled with air.
- **Improving imaging in large or deep-chested dogs:** The deeper a structure is in the body, the harder it is to image clearly. In larger dogs we sometimes need to press firmly with the probe, which requires the abdominal muscles to be relaxed.

We get the best value and most accurate results from imaging and many procedures when pets are appropriately sedated.

What to Expect

It's normal for any sedation protocol to have a residual effect that can last up to 8 hours afterward. During this time your pet may not want to play, walk, or eat much, but should be rousable — they may simply prefer to sleep it off.

Risk and How We Tailor Sedation to Your Pet

Sedation can carry some risk, as with any medication — possible side effects include drowsiness, nausea, or, in rare cases, an adverse reaction. Your veterinarian weighs the risks and benefits and selects a protocol that makes sense for your pet's specific situation.

For example, we'd avoid sedatives that significantly lower blood pressure and cardiac output in a pet with a potential heart problem. Similarly, it may be best to avoid — or reduce the dose of — sedatives metabolized by the liver in pets with liver dysfunction, otherwise they may take much longer to wake up.

There are few situations where sedation should be avoided altogether. In almost all cases, it's better to sedate than to cause your pet undue stress.

What to Expect on the Day

1. **Check-in and assessment**
   Our team will confirm details and check your pet over before administering any sedation.

2. **Sedation administered**
   Your vet selects a protocol suited to your pet and the procedure planned, balancing effectiveness with the least amount of after-effects.

3. **Procedure performed**
   With your pet calm and still, we proceed with the imaging, diagnostic, or minor procedure that was planned.

4. **Recovery**
   Your pet is monitored as the sedation wears off. Depending on the protocol used, this may be reversed, or may simply take a few hours to fully resolve.

Going Home

Your pet may seem groggy, sleepy, or a little unsteady on their feet for several hours after sedation — this is normal. Keep them somewhere warm, quiet, and supervised, with no stairs or unsupervised access to furniture until they're walking normally. Offer water and a small amount of food once they seem interested, but don't worry if they're not hungry right away.

⚠ Contact us if your pet seems excessively difficult to rouse, has trouble breathing, or you're otherwise concerned once home.

Sedation can sound daunting, but it's one of the lowest-risk tools we use, and it almost always makes things easier and less stressful for your pet. If you have any questions about whether sedation is right for your pet's situation, please don't hesitate to ask.