POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Home Care After Surgery

> These instructions apply to the first 10–14 days following a surgical procedure. Please read through before your pet is discharged so you know what to expect. Some sections may not apply depending on the specific procedure performed — your discharge paperwork will note anything that's different for your pet.

⚠ **When to call us immediately:** Pale gums, collapse, uncontrolled bleeding, difficulty breathing, or the incision opens up. For after-hours emergencies, see the contact information at the bottom of this page.

The First Night Home

- Keep your pet indoors in a warm, quiet space.
- Some grogginess or unsteadiness is normal for the first several hours — this is the anesthesia wearing off.
- Restrict activity: no stairs, no jumping on furniture, no unsupervised movement until they are fully steady on their feet.
- Offer small amounts of food and water. It's normal if they're not interested tonight.
- Pets often receive a good amount of IV fluids during surgery, so don't be alarmed if they're not drinking much the day of the procedure — this is expected and nothing to worry about.
- If there is a bandage on one leg, this was placed over the IV catheter site — **remove it after 15 minutes** unless instructed otherwise.
- A mild cough or slightly raspy breathing can occur from the anesthetic breathing tube. This typically resolves within 3 days. Contact us if it worsens.

Eating and Drinking

- Appetite is often reduced the evening of surgery — this is expected.
- By the following morning, most patients resume normal interest in food. Return to their regular diet unless you have been given specific instructions otherwise.
- Water should be available at all times.

Incision Care

Most incisions are closed with internal sutures only — **these dissolve on their own over several weeks and don't need to be removed.** However, some procedures use external sutures or staples instead, which do need to be removed, typically 10–14 days after surgery. Check your discharge paperwork or ask us if you're not sure which applies to your pet.

What to expect as it heals:

- Some redness and swelling at the incision in the first 24–48 hours is normal.
- Minor bruising around the site may develop in the first day or two — this fades with time.
- Over 10–14 days, the incision should become progressively paler, flatter, and less swollen.
- **There should be no discharge.** A small amount of dried crusting at the skin edge is acceptable; any fluid, pus, or persistent oozing is not.

Taking a photo of the incision each day is a simple way to track healing and makes it easier to describe any changes to us.

✓ DO

- Check the incision daily
- Use a cone or e-collar to prevent licking
- If painful: apply a cool (not ice-cold) compress wrapped in a towel for 10 minutes at a time

✗ DON'T

- Allow licking, scratching, or chewing at the site
- Apply any ointments, creams, or cleaning solutions unless instructed
- Get the incision wet (no baths or swimming)

ℹ **E-collar / cone of shame:** Recommended for the full 10–14 days. It can be removed for supervised meals and leashed walks, but should be back on any time your pet is unsupervised or resting.

Activity Restrictions — 14 Days

Internal sutures need time to hold before the tissues can tolerate normal stress. Overactivity is one of the most common causes of complications after surgery.

- Leashed walks only — keep them calm.
- No running, jumping, rough play, or climbing.
- No off-leash outdoor time.
- Prevent access to stairs if possible, or supervise carefully.
- No bathing or swimming for the full 14-day healing period.

Medications

- Give all prescribed medications as directed, for the full course — even if your pet seems comfortable.
- **Stop all medications and contact us** if you notice vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, or blood in the stool after starting them.
- Do not give over-the-counter pain medication (including ibuprofen, aspirin, or acetaminophen) without consulting us first — many human medications are toxic to animals.

Signs That Require Veterinary Attention

Contact us promptly if you notice any of the following:

- The incision is opening, gaping, or has significant discharge
- Swelling at the incision site is rapidly increasing, rather than gradually improving after the first few days
- Your pet is not eating or drinking by 24 hours post-surgery
- Persistent vomiting or diarrhea
- Lethargy or weakness beyond the first 24 hours
- Difficulty urinating
- Cough that worsens or persists beyond 3 days
- Any other change that concerns you

Seek emergency care immediately for: pale or white gums, collapse, uncontrolled bleeding, or difficulty breathing.

What to Expect: Recovery Timeline

1. **Day 1 — Surgery day**
   Grogginess, reduced appetite, and mild swelling at the incision are expected. Keep your pet confined and quiet.

2. **Days 2–3 — Early recovery**
   Appetite typically returns. Some bruising may appear around the incision. Energy levels may start to improve — continue strict rest despite this.

3. **Days 4–10 — Active healing**
   Swelling and redness at the incision should be decreasing. Maintain activity restrictions. Itching at the incision is common as healing progresses — the e-collar is important during this phase.

4. **Days 10–14 — End of restricted period**
   The skin should be closed and the incision well on its way to healed. If healing has progressed normally, normal activity can resume. Internal sutures continue dissolving over the following weeks.

Follow-Up Steps

Depending on what was done during surgery, one or more of the following may apply to your pet:

- **Visible stitches?** These will need to be removed in 10–14 days — please book an appointment with one of our technicians.
- **Bandage or drain?** This will need to be removed within 3 days. Please contact us to arrange this.
- **Splint?** This will need to be checked and replaced within 7–14 days. Please book a follow-up appointment.

Pending Diagnostics

If any samples or imaging were collected during surgery, we will contact you once results are available. Typical turnaround times are listed below for reference — please don't hesitate to follow up with us if you haven't heard back.

- **Routine bloodwork:** 1–2 days. More specialized panels may take longer.
- **Urinalysis:** 1–2 days.
- **Cytology:** 3–4 days.
- **Bacterial culture and sensitivity:** 3–4 days, up to a week.
- **X-rays or ultrasound:** 2–7 days.
- **Biopsy:** 2 weeks or more.

Follow-Up and Contact

We will reach out the day after surgery to check in. If you have non-urgent updates or photos of the incision, you're welcome to send them through. For anything that concerns you, don't hesitate to call.

ROYAL BAY VETERINARY CLINIC

During clinic hours

250-940-4646

hello@royalbayvet.ca

AFTER-HOURS EMERGENCIES

Central Victoria Veterinary Hospital
250-475-2495
760 Roderick St

WAVES Emergency
778-432-4322
947 Langford Parkway