

# WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN MY PET NEEDS ANESTHESIA?

If you're nervous about your pet undergoing anesthesia, you're not alone. Many pet owners are so fearful about anesthesia and sedation that they delay or avoid important treatments for their beloved animal family members. But it's often the best—or only—way for your pet to receive high-quality care without pain, stress, or discomfort.

Don't be afraid to ask your veterinary team why anesthesia is necessary. For example, anesthesia is used in dentistry because animals are unlikely to relax enough to let the veterinarian poke around their mouths to do a proper dental cleaning—let alone a more invasive or emergency procedure.

Your veterinary anesthesia staff is trained to carefully select, dose, and administer medications, and to monitor your pet while they are at the hospital. But, a big part of the success of your pet's anesthetic procedure is up to you.

## **Anesthesia care begins (and ends) at home**

Anesthesia is a “continuum of care” according to the *2020 AAHA Anesthesia and Monitoring Guidelines for Dogs and Cats*. As the home caregiver for your pet, you are a vital part of the process. While you won't be the one administering anesthesia, you are the veterinary staff's eyes and ears—it's your job to report on your pet's behavior and symptoms before you leave the house and after your pet returns home.

## **Before your pet gets anesthesia . . .**

Here are some questions your veterinary team might ask:

- How is your pet's energy level? How well does he tolerate exercise?
- How often does he cough or sneeze? Any changes in his breathing?
- How often does he vomit?
- How much, how often, and what does he eat? Any changes?
- Has your pet ever had anesthesia before? What happened?
- What medical problems does he have?
- List all his prescription medications, supplements (including cannabidiol, aka CBD), and over-the-counter medications. Which ones has he taken in the last 24 hours?

- Has your pet had any food or water today?
- What procedure is he having today?
- What concerns do you have?

### **After your pet gets anesthesia . . .**

Some pain medications can last for 8 to 12 hours in dogs and up to 24 hours in cats. The first 12 to 24 hours after the procedure, your pet might not act “normal” and could seem groggy or confused.

Here are some relatively typical behaviors after anesthesia:

- **Sleepiness**—This could be due to the medications he received. Or, if he has been in the hospital for several days, your pet may not have slept normally, leaving him sleep deprived.
- **Decreased defecation** —Many pets don’t have a bowel movement for 24 to 48 hours after an anesthetic procedure, especially if they did not receive food prior to the procedure.
- **Lack of coordination**—It’s not unusual for pets to have wobbly walking and jumbled jumping for a few hours, especially if they received potent pain medication.
- **Whining**—Don’t assume the worst if your pet is extra vocal for a little while. Some pets are very pain-sensitive, while others might just be disoriented from medication.
- **Lack of appetite**—Depending on the type of the procedure or the medications used, some pets might need appetite stimulants or special food to regain their hunger.

### **Do not do these things after your pet’s anesthesia**

- Don’t give your pet stool softeners or other unauthorized over-the-counter medications that your veterinarian doesn’t know about.
- Don’t let him climb stairs, jump around, or roam outside alone for 24 hours.
- Don’t feed him human food without your veterinarian’s OK.
- Don’t ignore unusually stressed crying that persists for more than 30-60 minutes.
- Don’t ignore vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation that lasts longer than 48 hours.

### **Call your veterinarian if . . .**

- Your pet seems extremely stressed and cries for more than an hour (or even less, if his behavior is very out of character). Your veterinarian or an afterhours emergency hospital may be able to provide a different pain medication or a sedative.
- Your pet isn't eating when the veterinarian expected he would, vomits, develops diarrhea, or refuses to eat or drink for more than 12 hours.
- After 24 hours, your pet is still sleepy and can't be easily woken up by gentle petting.
- After 24 hours, your pet is still wobbly or bumping into furniture and walls.
- After 48 hours, your pet hasn't pooped or is straining to poop.

Keep in mind that any loss of consciousness takes time to wear off. When the body goes into deep sleep and then wakes up again, it's like a computer rebooting, which can be slow, especially if it was a serious or emergency procedure.

Don't hesitate to raise your concerns, and more importantly, don't delay treatments that could help your pet have a healthier, happier life.