

Post-operative Information: Subtotal Colectomy

Your pet has undergone a procedure called a subtotal colectomy. This means that 90-95% of the large intestine has been removed, and the small intestine was connected to the rectum. The procedure is performed when procedures such as enemas and stool softeners fail to medically manage the condition called “megacolon” (a distended colon that does not empty properly). The goal of this surgery is to resolve your pet’s constipation.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTIONS

- Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe indoor location for the next 24 hours until he/she is very steady on his/her feet. Do not allow free access to stairs.
- Your pet may be groggy for a few days. Cats may purr, hunch over, or hide and sleep more than usual, and dogs may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your veterinarian for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.
- Avoid any rigorous activity (jumping or playing) and avoid stairs for 2 weeks. For cats, please keep them inside only. For dogs, short, leashed walks are fine.
- Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 1-2 days*, please call your primary care veterinarian or return for progress evaluation and problem-solving.
- You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5 days. Some animals take longer than others depending on when they last ate prior to surgery and when they started eating after surgery. It may be abnormal in color and consistency for 2-3 days. If you have any concerns, please speak with your primary care veterinarian.
- Please confirm that your pet has urinated within 24 hours of returning home. If he/she does not, or you notice any problems related to urination, please speak with your primary care veterinarian.

INCISION CARE & MONITORING

- Please look at the incision on your pet’s abdomen twice daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, and slightly swollen/thick on the edges. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling.
- Problems to call your veterinarian about:
 - gapping (the edges should be exactly touching)
 - discharge (other than small amount of crusting)
 - swelling (other than slightly raised skin near edges).Some bruising is normal and will resolve in 5-7 days.
- Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision. Pets tend to want to lick early in the healing period and this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. If necessary, please use an E-collar if you must leave your pet unattended.

RECOVERY MONITORING & COMPLICATIONS

- The most dangerous complication of this surgery is a serious infection called peritonitis. This occurs if the incision in the intestine leaks. The colon has a very large number of bacteria that can cause an infection if the reconnected intestine leaks. Fortunately, this is very rare, but when it occurs, it is life-threatening. Signs of peritonitis typically occur 3-5 days after surgery, and include:
 - *Abdominal tenderness*
 - *Loss of appetite*
 - *Lethargy or hiding*

Please call and return for a progress exam immediately (or go to an emergency hospital if overnight or weekends) if you notice these changes. The earlier we catch peritonitis, the easier it is to treat. This is a life-threatening complication.

- Pets may not always eat well immediately after surgery. Dehydration may occur if your pet is not taking in enough food and water. **Please call your veterinarian if your pet is not eating or drinking within 24 hours of coming home.**

PROGRESS EXAMS

- Please return for a progress appointment with your veterinarian in 10-14 days. They will assess your pet's healing and recovery, remove any skin sutures, and address any questions you may have at that time. Additional examinations will be recommended as needed.

DIET

- Offer your pet's normal diet; if he/she is not interested, you can tempt their appetite by frequently offering small amounts of meat babyfood or boiled chicken/turkey throughout the day. Warming canned pet food for a few seconds in the microwave may make it more appealing (test temperature before feeding).
- If your cat does not eat within 24 hours, call your veterinarian for advice.

LONG TERM LIFESTYLE

- For cats, please note that your pet will be visiting the litterbox much more often, so be sure to clean it more frequently. Keeping the box clean will help prevent defecation outside the box. Adding another box to their home environment may help as well.
- The main function of the colon is to resorb water from stool before it is expelled from the body. Removing the colon results in stool that contains more water. Your pet will defecate more frequently, and the stools will be soft. Initially, pets may need to defecate many times a day, but over the next 6 weeks, most animals will modify their small intestine function and develop the ability to absorb more water. Stool will look a bit more formed (though not "normal") and frequency of defecation will be around 4-5 times daily. *Dietary modifications can be made to help with stool consistency; some trial-and-error is necessary to find the right balance of fiber.* Please consult with your veterinarian for assistance.
- Most pets do very well after having this surgery, and they typically do not need further medical therapy for constipation. Your pet may live a more comfortable lifestyle with the burden of constipation relieved.