

## Spay/Neuter Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is a High-Quality High-Volume Spay/Neuter Clinic and how is it different from having surgery at a private veterinarian?**

The Toronto Humane Society Public Veterinary Services operates a high-quality high-volume spay and neuter clinic. This clinic model provides safe spay and neuter surgeries to large numbers of patients through standardized protocols and efficient techniques. This type of clinic is best suited for healthy cats and dogs undergoing routine surgeries and is not designed to serve the needs of high-risk patients. We can perform surgeries on many more patients each day than a typical private veterinarian as we focus just on spay and neuter surgery. Our surgeons are skilled at performing these surgeries quickly due to extensive training in efficient spay and neuter techniques. Shorter anesthesia time reduces the risk of complications for your pet. Studies have shown that High-Quality High-Volume Spay and Neuter clinics are just as safe as regular veterinary clinics and have similar complication rates. Our clinic provides close monitoring of each patient throughout the surgery and pain medications during and after surgery.

### **Which pets are eligible for surgery?**

Please see the Spay/Neuter Eligibility handout for detailed information about surgery eligibility guidelines. Please email [csa@torontohumanesociety.com](mailto:csa@torontohumanesociety.com) with any further questions.

### **Is the surgery risky? What are the possible complications?**

Most young and healthy patients have no complications with surgery and recover well from spay or neuter surgery. The most common surgery complications are minor and are related to healing of the incision:

- Infection
- Bruising
- Coming apart of the incision at the skin level (minor dehiscence)
- Accumulation of fluid under the skin (seroma)
- Reaction to the stitches causing inflammation (suture reaction)

More serious complications with surgery are very rare, especially with routine spay and neuter surgeries on young and healthy patients. They can include:

- Bleeding during or after surgery
- Coming apart of the incision at the deeper level (major dehiscence)
- Damage to other organs
- A piece of the ovary accidentally left behind (ovarian remnant syndrome) resulting in ongoing heat cycles

Certain pets may have a higher likelihood of surgical complications due to their age, medical conditions, or reproductive status. If your pet is found to have a higher risk of complications based on the presurgical exam, this will be discussed with you prior to surgery, and you will be given the option of whether to proceed.

### **Is general anesthesia risky? What are the possible complications?**

Most young and healthy patients have no complications with anesthesia and recover well from spay or neuter surgery. Our medical team is highly qualified and is familiar with managing complications with anesthesia. The risk of serious complications in a high-quality high-volume spay and neuter clinic is lower than what has been reported for veterinary surgery overall. This is likely due to working with primarily young and healthy animals and having a team that is



experienced and skilled at providing this specific set of surgical procedures. Serious complications from anesthesia are rare but can include allergic reactions to drugs or vaccines given, seizures, worsening of pre-existing conditions (such as heart or kidney disease), or even death during the anesthesia. The reported risk death during a spay or neuter surgery at a high-volume clinic is 0.03% (3 animals per 10,000). The rare cases of death during spay or neuter surgery are most commonly related to underlying heart problems, primarily in cats.

**Are patients intubated for surgery?**

Dogs, female cats, and certain higher-risk patients are always intubated for surgery to protect the airway and provide gas anesthesia and oxygen. Male cats are typically given oxygen by mask during the neuter procedure and not intubated, as the procedure is very brief. Intubating cats can cause irritation of the airway and is not always needed for short procedures in healthy patients. Our registered veterinary technicians are skilled at intubation and can intubate a patient if needed due to risk factors or complications.

**Do you place intravenous (IV) catheters for surgery?**

We do not always place intravenous (IV) catheters during surgery because most of our surgical procedures are very brief (10-15 minutes for cats, 20-30 minutes for dogs). Our clinic can place an IV catheter if needed for higher-risk patients, prolonged procedures, or in the event of a complication.

**Do you give intravenous (IV) fluids for surgery?**

We do not give intravenous (IV) fluids during surgery. Unlike sick pets or pets undergoing long surgical procedures, healthy pets undergoing short surgical procedures generally do not require IV fluids. Our clinic does have the ability to administer IV fluids if needed in cases of complications or if the surgery is taking longer than expected.

**Can my pet get vaccines at the same time as surgery?**

We strongly recommend that your pet is fully vaccinated with core vaccines at least two weeks prior to surgery in order to reduce the risk of contracting a disease while in the clinic. Core vaccines for dogs are Rabies and DHPP (Distemper/Hepatitis/Parvovirus/Parainfluenza). Core vaccines for cats are Rabies and FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis/Calicivirus/Panleukopenia). Vaccines can be obtained prior to surgery through your primary care veterinarian or by booking a wellness appointment.

If your pet is not current on vaccinations at the time of surgery, we will administer the core vaccines. It is required to either have your pet vaccinated prior to surgery or consent to core vaccines administered during surgery. If your pet is vaccinated during the surgery, there is still a risk that they could acquire an infectious disease while at the clinic for surgery. If your pet is vaccinated during surgery, it could also be more difficult to detect and manage vaccine reactions.

Additional vaccines such as Leptospirosis, Lyme, Bordetella, or FeLV are not required and are not offered at time of surgery.

**Who is doing the surgery on my pet?**

Surgery is performed by Toronto Humane Society staff veterinarians. Our veterinarians are trained in high-quality high-volume spay and neuter techniques. We do occasionally have final year veterinary students or licensed veterinarians obtaining additional surgical training who participate in our surgeries. This is always under the direct supervision and guidance of a staff veterinarian.



**Will my pet be painful after surgery?**

All procedures are performed under general anaesthesia, so your pet is not conscious during the surgery. Pain medications are administered during and after the procedure to ensure your animal is not painful while recovering. Our pain management protocol is sufficient for pain relief for most patients. If you feel your pet is painful at home after the surgery, please contact us and a client service representative will ask for additional details for a veterinarian to review. We may ask you to come in for a recheck exam if we feel additional pain relief would benefit your pet. Do NOT give your pet any human pain relief medications as these are often toxic to pets.

**Why doesn't my cat get pain medication to go home?**

Cats receive multiple types of injectable pain medications as part of the anesthesia protocol, as well as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain medication injection that lasts for 24 hours. With high-volume surgical techniques, incisions are very small and this amount of pain relief is generally sufficient. If you feel your pet is painful at home after the surgery, please contact us and a client service representative will ask for additional details for a veterinarian to review. We may ask you to come in for a recheck exam if we feel additional pain relief would benefit your pet. Do NOT give your pet any human pain relief medications as these are often toxic to pets.

**Are there stitches that need to be removed?**

Stitches are placed under the skin and are dissolvable. There is no need to remove stitches. Male cats do not have stitches and the incisions are left open to drain and heal on their own.

**Why do you tattoo the animals?**

All patients receive a small green tattoo at the time of surgery. Female animals and male cats have the tattoo near the belly button. Male dogs have the tattoo near the groin. This is to indicate that the pet has been surgically sterilized to avoid any unnecessary surgery or confusion in the future. The tattoo will generally not be visible once the hair grows back. The tattoo is not optional.

**Can I take my animal on TTC to get home after surgery?**

According to the TTC website, leashed pets or pets secured in an enclosed container are welcome to travel on the TTC during weekends and weekday off-peak periods (before 6:30 AM, from 10 AM-3:30 PM, or after 7 PM). This means you may be able to take the TTC to get here in the morning if you are traveling early, but the discharge time would be during peak hours and taking pets on board is technically not allowed. You may wish to ask a friend or family member for a ride, or take a taxi or ride share.

**Can I leave my pet alone after surgery?**

We recommend someone be home the evening after surgery to monitor your pet and make sure they continue to recover smoothly from the procedure. Symptoms of a serious surgical complication would usually appear in the first 24 hours. If your pet seems to be recovering well the day after surgery, it should be fine to resume your normal routine such as leaving your pet alone during the workday.

**Does my pet need to be separated other pets in my home?**

If possible, separate your pet during the surgery recovery period (7-10 days) to reduce the chances of rough play or the other pets licking the incision.

**Will my pet stop marking his territory now?**

Urine spraying by male cats and urine marking by male dogs can be related to the testosterone hormone and may decrease within a few weeks of neutering. However, this can also become an ingrained behaviour that may not fully resolve with neutering, especially if your pet is older when neutered. We recommend consulting with your regular veterinarian if the urine marking continues after surgery.

**Will my pet's behaviour change after surgery?**

Hormones are just one of many factors that can affect behaviour. Your pet will likely not change significantly in behaviour or personality after surgery. Certain behaviours associated with sex hormones such as roaming, humping, or heat cycle behaviours may decrease or disappear.

**Can my pet eat with the cone on?**

Most pets can eat with the cone on. If your pet seems to be having trouble, you can remove the cone during meals.

**Will my cat be able to use their litter box with their cone on?**

Most cats can use the litterbox with the cone on. If your pet seems to be having trouble, you may want to remove the lid of the litterbox or offer a lower litterbox.

**My pet's cone keeps coming off, what can I do?**

Unfortunately, e-collars (cones) don't work for every patient, and some may need an alternative. These are our suggestions to protect the incision:

- Ensure the cone is secured with a collar that has been tightened but still allows a two-finger width space between the neck and collar.
- There are other cone options (such as fabric, inflatable donut, or more durable plastic ones) that can be purchased at a local pet store or veterinary clinic.
- Some pets may leave the incision alone even without a cone. If you have watched your pet without the cone and they seem to have no interest in licking or chewing at the incision, they may not need to wear one.

**Can my dog go to daycare during the recovery period?**

We recommend not bringing your animal to a doggy daycare during the recovery period unless they can provide a clean and calm environment away from other animals. Your pet should be resting for 7-10 days. Home is the best place for them to heal after a surgery.

**Can my pet walk up stairs?**

Yes, your pet can walk up stairs after surgery. However, we recommend minimizing activity as much as possible for 7-10 days after surgery. Excessive exercise or jumping can cause complications with healing of the incision.

**Can my dog go to dog parks or go on long walks?**

No, during this period you should keep your dog confined to very short leash walks (in the backyard or around the block) and maintain a calm pace. Avoid dog parks, long walks, or off-leash activities for the full 7-10 days.

