
Diaphragmatic Hernia Repair



One of the most useful and efficient ways to convey information to you about your pet is via the written word. We carefully craft these notes to give you helpful information and accurate expectations around your pet's surgical experience.

Please read this. *Please save it and read it during each stage of the recovery process.* Surprises make for a stressful time for everyone.

Your pet has had a hole in the diaphragm (hernia) repaired surgically; the hole is a result of trauma or birth defect. The surgery usually involves creating a large incision in the abdomen to provide access to the diaphragm—a muscular wall that separates the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity. The displaced abdominal organs are removed from the chest cavity and repositioned into their normal abdomen locations; the hole in the diaphragm is sewn closed; air is removed from the chest cavity to allow lungs to reexpand; and the abdomen is closed again. Lungs are sensitive during this time and breathing is compromised. Several months are required for convalescence after this type of trauma and surgical treatment.

First few days postop

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please keep a note of your questions as you and your pet progress thru recovery and address them to your primary care veterinary team. Our surgery group will contact your primary care team on Day 2 (after their phone follow-up with you) and Day 14 (after your recheck visit with them) to check in on your pet's progress and see if you have had any concerns or questions. This method will maintain continuity in care and an accurate patient medical record. ****Use your checklist at the end of these notes to make these check-ins complete****

Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe, indoor location without free access to stairs for the next 24 hours as he/she recovers from anesthesia and surgery.

Your pet may be groggy for the next few days. He or she may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your primary care veterinary team for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.

When you get home, and your pet is resting, count his/her breathing rate (breaths per minute); this can be your baseline for comparison later. If he/she is having any significant problems in the chest, the breathing rate will steadily rise and stay high. Please call your primary care veterinarian or visit an emergency clinic as soon as you notice this change, or if your pet looks distressed with breathing.

Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 2-3 days*, please call your primary care veterinary team 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 veterinary team.

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 veterinary team.

MEDICATIONS

It is likely that you have been prescribed one or more medications (given by mouth) for your pet over the first 2-3wks of recovery. During the discharge appointment or shortly thereafter, please make sure you understand:

- what each medication is being used to treat,
- what side-effects may develop, and
- whether or not the medication should be refilled and continued.

BANDAGE CARE (IF PRESENT)

A clear, plastic bandaid may have been applied to the incision (Tegaderm). This will protect the incision from contamination from the environment and a wayward pet tongue! It is useful for up to 7-10 days. You may remove it like a "bandaid" at any time. If it is hard to peel off, waiting longer will make for easier removal. There is no urgency in taking it off unless you notice excessive redness, swelling or discharge.

Week 1-2 postop

MONITORING

Please look at the incision on your pet's abdomen twice daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, slightly swollen/thick on the edges with a light crust down the center. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling.

Problems to call your veterinarian about:

- gapping (the edges should be exactly touching)
- ongoing or new 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.

RESTRICTIONS

Avoid any rigorous activity for 6 weeks. For dogs, short, leashed walks to urinate/defecate are fine.

Do not allow your pet to lick, chew or scratch the incision. Pets tend to want to lick early in the healing period and scratch later in the healing period; this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. If necessary, please prevent access to the incision by using creative clothing options, an E-collar or other devices, if you must leave your pet unattended.

Minimal, supervised/assisted access to stairs is recommended during restricted period. Use baby gates, etc. to prevent free access to stairs during this restricted period. When navigating stairs (up and down), have a hand/leash on collar/harness and ideally a sling/strap under the belly to prevent slips, stumbles, falls. Do not allow dogs or cats to jump up or down from heights/furniture during this restricted period.

Please use a short (~6ft), hand-held leash when outside to urinate/defecate. Confine your pet to a small area/room/crate when unattended. Please do not allow your pet to run, jump or play during this restriction period.

If your pet's personality-type challenges these restrictions, discuss options for medicinal-assistance for your pet to make restrictions easier to manage (i.e. Trazadone, Gabapentin, Tramadol, other).

TEST PENDING

If there were any samples removed for testing, they will be submitted and results usually will be available in 5-7 days. Your primary care team will contact you with test results and make any treatment changes as needed.

PROGRESS EXAMS

Please return to your primary care clinic in 10-14 days for a progress exam. Skin healing will be evaluated, sutures (if present) will be removed, and any questions you have will be addressed.

Month 1-2 postop

After 6 weeks, your pet can begin light activities on leash. Avoid athletic activities until 3 months postoperative.

Longterm lifestyle

There are no longterm lifestyle modifications that are required after diaphragmatic hernia repair.

Checklist:

HOME MONITORING AND PROGRESS CHECK-IN WITH PRIMARY CARE VETERINARY TEAM

- Pet attitude and appetite—Are these improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Pet mobility—Is this improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Incision health—Is redness and swelling going away? Is there discharge or moisture? (Photos taken close-up and at different angles are helpful for your primary care veterinary team.)
- Pet pain level—What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Breathing rate—Has this been getting slower and more regular? What circumstances cause it to change?

Based on your own experience through this, we welcome and encourage suggestions to this information that may help future patients and their people. Pay it forward! (directvetsurg@gmail.com)

--The DVS Crew