
Intestinal Surgery



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.

Photo and video examples may be found on our website: www.directvetsurg.com in the Pet Owner Portal under "DVS Resources".

Your pet has had surgery performed on the intestines to remove abnormal tissue or an abnormal object. The intestines are very fragile structures and healing of the internal incisions can be compromised or delayed, resulting in leakage of intestinal contents and life-threatening illness. The majority of patients recover rapidly and without complication, but careful monitoring is essential to catching early signs of complications. Do not hesitate to check in frequently with your primary care veterinary team. Longterm, patients rarely have problems associated with intestinal surgery; appetite and activity will likely return to pre-operative levels within 2-4 weeks.

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.****

First few days postop

MONITORING

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.

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.

The critical time in intestinal healing is 5-7 days postoperatively. A sudden decline after initial improvement, or steady lack of any improvement over the first week are reasons to seek veterinary evaluation. This may require an after-hours visit to the emergency room.

The intestines often slow down or stop moving after anesthesia and surgery; this can be uncomfortable and lead to intestinal leakage problems. The best way to get the intestines moving again is to have your pet move around. This need only be standing up and moving around for a few minutes, nothing strenuous. Every 2-4hrs during the daytime, ask your pet to get up to change positions and move around the room a bit. For dogs, if and when they are feeling stronger, encourage them to walk around the yard with you.

You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5-7 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.

Closely supervise your pet's movements over the first 3-4 days when s/he will be groggy from anesthetics and pain medications. Limit activities to necessary events only (on leash/out to go to the bathroom; access to food/water.)

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

A clear, plastic bandaid may have been applied to the incision (Tegaderm). This will protect the incision from infection from the environment and a wayward pet tongue! It is useful for 1-2 days. You may remove it like a “bandaid” at any time. If it is hard to peel off, waiting longer may make for easier removal. There is no urgency in taking it off.

DIET

Start offering food when your pet comes home from surgery. Commonly, patients are not interested in eating the first 1-2d postoperatively, so don’t be worried. Appetite is actually stimulated by getting the intestines moving as mentioned above. Encouraging your pet to walk around frequently will improve appetite.

Feed your pet’s normal food if they are interested. Supplement this with small amounts of good smelling foods like human baby foods, scrambled eggs, canned pet food; keep these supplements to small amounts so that stomach upset is not made worse with the rich foods.

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.

The occasional patient will have more extensive bruising and/or swelling on day 2-3. If this develops, please let your primary care veterinarian know; a visit or sending photos will help

them characterize the issue and decide on a course of action. The vast majority of the time, this is a transient issue that will follow a typical 5-7 day course resolving.

Do not allow your pet to lick or chew 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 (ex long-sleeved T-shirt; baby “one-sies”) an E-collar or other devices, if you must leave your pet unattended. See www.directvetsurg.com, Pet Owner portal→Pet Links and DVS Resources

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, use of the limb will be assessed and any questions you have will be addressed.

RESTRICTIONS

Avoid any rigorous activity for 2 weeks. For dogs, short, leashed walks to urinate/defecate are fine.

Longterm lifestyle

The majority of animals having had intestinal surgery will have no long-term side-effects. In specific patients who have lost significant lengths of bowel, some dietary or bathroom-habit accommodations may be needed lifelong.

Always advise all veterinary professionals that your pet has had GI surgery in his/her past should your pet become ill for any reason in the future.

Checklist:

HOME MONITORING AND PROGRESS CHECK-IN WITH 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?
- Other

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