

Spaying and Neutering - What to Look for After Surgery

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Organizations like *Spay FIRST!* work hard to develop spay/neuter programs in communities that have never had a low cost option. Founder Ruth Steinberger says, "We stress how important it is to ask questions about care for cats following surgery in order to keep them healthy and to get a good start on a long life."



First time cat owners won't know what potential problems to look for. Experienced cat owners may need to refresh their knowledge if it's been a while since they've had a new cat. **What's normal and what's cause for a call or visit to the veterinarian?**

Dr. Cindy Houlihan, DVM and owner of *The Cat Practice* in Birmingham, Michigan, says it's important to monitor your cat's behavior for two weeks after the operation. The first 48 hours are especially important. Her daily checklist includes:

- Any signs of bleeding or discharge, particularly on the first day
- Pale gums or paw pads
- Swelling or redness
- Poor appetite
- Lethargy
- Excessive licking
- Change in behavior
- Stiff walking or sensitivity to touch

Older or overweight cats will have a longer recovery period than a young kitten. [Willow](#) says her five year old cat, Sonja, didn't want to move for the first three days, while the younger cat, Pixie, felt well enough to remove a couple of her own stitches. With extra pain medication, Sonja began her recovery too. Each cat's tolerance for pain may be different.

[Ananya](#) says her cat Gucci was five years old and had never gone into heat. The veterinarian decided on a more invasive surgery which meant a larger incision. He found Gucci's uterus and ovaries were malformed. The second day after surgery, Gucci was still uncomfortable and not eating as much as usual so she went back to the doctor for an injection of antibiotics which helped.

[Lyrajean](#) recommends scheduling surgery the day before you have time off work - then you can be at home to supervise the pain medications, the post-surgery e-collar (the hated cone) or baby-sized shirts worn to protect the incision from your cat's curiosity. Her cat Aya, put up quite a protest over wearing the cone.

In the wild, a wounded animal is vulnerable so pets have learned to hide their pain, even from family. Veterinarians are able to administer pain medication prior to the surgery. Relief can last a couple of days and gives your cat a head start on controlling her discomfort. Pilling a cat can prove to be an almost impossible job. As an alternative that's easier on you and the cat, try pain patches and transdermal creams that absorb through the skin via the ear. These methods work well with a cat who is already displeased with you over the whole spay/neuter idea.

It pays to know who to call after hours in case your cat has a problem. [Abbymom](#) got no follow up instructions from the vet so she was in a panic when Abby vomited and urinated in the crate. Luckily, she was able to reach a vet tech at the doctor's office who could tell her what to do. Withholding food for the evening helped and the vet called to check or make suggestions until Abby was herself again.

A reaction to anesthesia can be a problem. Ask what kind your vet plans to use. Often gas makes for an easier recovery than an injectable version. Know what will work best for your pet. Age, weight, general health and breed can all play a factor.

Male cats have it somewhat easier because neutering is a less invasive surgery but they don't get a free pass. Their recovery time will be shorter but they'll still need to keep quiet and suffer through your daily exams for any signs of a problem.

Dr. Houlihan says, "For many years, pain management was under-recognized and under-used. Veterinarians now plan ahead to keep your cats as comfortable as possible after a spay or neuter procedure."

All owners worry. Make a list of questions to ask so you don't get nervous and forget, be sure to get follow up instructions and watch your cat for signs of any problems. It won't take away all the worry but it will take away the panic.

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