

ANESTHESIA: WHAT TO EXPECT

Whether the patient is a person or a pet, undergoing anesthesia carries some risk of complications. If the situation is not an emergency, your veterinarian will examine your pet and might run some tests, such as blood work, to help identify those risks. Your veterinarian wants to make sure the animal is healthy enough to undergo anesthesia.

Your veterinarian or veterinary technician will explain the procedure to you and discuss the patient assessment and risks, the proposed anesthetic plan, and any medical or surgical alternatives before obtaining informed consent to anesthetize your pet and perform the procedure.

To help reduce the risk of complications, it is very important that you follow the directions of the veterinarian, especially regarding patient preparation.

Before the Day of the Procedure

- Follow the veterinarian's directions.
- You might be asked to change the medications you give your pet. You could be asked to skip a dose or to give a different medication.
- You will be asked to withhold food for a certain time to reduce the risk of regurgitation and aspiration—breathing in the contents of the stomach and gastric juices into the lungs. You may also be instructed to withhold water from your pet, depending on the veterinarian.
- Older animals must fast longer than younger animals do for three reasons: (1) older pets' metabolism is slower, (2) it often takes them longer to digest their food, and (3) they usually have greater energy reserves than younger animals.
- If your pet has diabetes, your veterinarian might not require fasting or might instruct you to adjust your pet's insulin.

Note! *When your pet is unconscious, the gag reflex is suppressed. Your pet could inhale stomach contents, causing serious injury, even death. So, you must be very strict about withholding food, and maybe water, for the specified time, if instructed to do so.*

Your veterinarian will perform certain tasks before the procedure (often the same day), including a thorough evaluation of your pet. This evaluation should include a blood test to make sure your pet is healthy enough to undergo anesthesia. (If the situation is an emergency, the veterinarian might run additional tests and perform measures to stabilize your pet before the procedure to better prepare your pet for anesthesia.)

The evaluation also will include:

- History
- Physical examination
- Review the age, breed, and temperament
- Evaluate the procedure's level of invasiveness, anticipated pain, risk of hemorrhage (bleeding) or hypothermia (decreased body temperature)
- Consider the best type of anesthesia and medication

- Make sure the team assisting the veterinarian is well trained
- Create an individual anesthesia plan for your pet

On the Day of the Procedure

Before the Procedure

As the veterinary team prepares your pet for the procedure, your veterinarian will:

- Make sure equipment is working and medication is close by.
- Prepare your pet for anesthesia.
- Begin to implement your pet's individual anesthesia plan.
- Make sure your pet is monitored throughout the procedure and during recovery.
- Recognize and quickly respond to any complications if they develop.
- Assess and manage your pet's potential pain level before, during, and after the procedure.

After the Procedure

When your pet is awake, aware, warm, and comfortable, he or she will be discharged. But first, the veterinarian or veterinary staff will:

- Review the procedure and how it went.
- Explain follow-up care, including when your pet can begin to eat and drink.
- Tell you when to resume current medications.
- Tell you how to give new medications, if needed.
- Explain how to recognize signs of complications in your pet. It is important that you call the veterinarian's office immediately if your pet has a complication.
- Tell you when to bring your pet back for a re-check.
- In addition to telling you the instructions, your veterinarian or veterinary staff should give you a written copy of the aftercare instructions.