



### **Frequently Asked Questions**

In the following paragraphs we try to answer our most frequently asked questions. It may be helpful for you to read through this information. You may find answers to the questions that can arise throughout the treatment process at VSOA. However, we are always glad to talk to you directly, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you are concerned about your pet. Another place to look for post operative care information would be on the instruction sheets that were sent home at your Go Home Appointment.

#### **What is the emergency phone number to call after hours?**

Call Diamond Animal Hospital at (907) 562 8384 or Pet Emergency at (907) 274 5636

#### **How do I make an appointment?**

You can make an appointment by calling 907-274-0645. One of the receptionists will take your contact information and start a file in our system. Once you are in our system, they will schedule the appointment based on what will work best with your schedule, as well as by the type of problem your animal has. All three of our surgeons are equally capable of doing any type of surgery. However, they all have their preferences too. If your dog does not have a surgical problem, you will be scheduled either with our dermatologist or our rehab specialist, again depending on the issue your pet has.

#### **What can I expect at my initial visit?**

**Surgery:** When you first come to see us for a surgical problem, plan to spend about 45 minutes with the doctor. The doctor will gather some history about what is happening with your pet and then palpate the entire animal. Sometimes if your regular vet is sending you to see us because they found hip dysplasia on a radiograph, after a thorough examination we may find that your pet's problem is actually coming from a torn cruciate ligament. After the doctor determines the diagnosis, he will recommend a procedure or rehab. A majority of the time will be spent explaining how the procedure works and what to expect afterwards.

**Rehab:** How your initial rehab appointment goes will be determined by if your animal is going into rehab after surgery or if your animal has a non-surgical problem. In general, for the first visit, much of the time is spent getting to know your pet. Muscle mass, range of motion, and gait are some of the main things evaluated during a rehab exam. Your pet may then be introduced to the underwater treadmill (tank) for a brief session and that is often followed by some ground exercises and or massage. If your pet is paralyzed, they may be measured for a cart and several other devices we use to help aid in your pet's mobility.



**Dermatology:** Dermatology has an initial form they have you fill out to give us some background on your pet's history. Many dermatology patients come to us after a long road of trying different things. Depending on the type of issue your pet has, your pet may have some skin scrapings or other slides made. Oftentimes, the doctor may determine that your pet needs to come back for an additional diagnostic appointment – allergy tests are usually done under sedation and some biopsies need to be performed under general anesthesia.

For any of these appointments, you can expect to meet with the doctor, learn about the treatment plan of your pet, and the prognosis to expect. The receptionists can give you more detailed information on what to expect when you call to schedule your initial appointment.

### **Can you be my pet's regular vet?**

Unfortunately, we do not do routine veterinary care. This is because during the course of training to be a specialist, some of the routine things get left behind. Therefore, a general vet is best prepared to give vaccinations or deal with urinary tract infections, etc.

### **What is it going to cost?**

There will be an initial exam fee, which is determined by which service you are seeing. The receptionists can tell you what that fee is when you call to schedule your appointment. After we determine what procedure your pet needs, we will put together an estimate of costs. The estimate generally includes catheter and fluids, anesthesia, surgery costs, implants (if necessary), radiographs-both pre and post op (if necessary), pain management during and after surgery, hospitalization, and medications to go home with. The follow up appointment is provided at no charge unless your pet needs additional medications. Rehab is usually not included or follow-up bandage changes or x-rays that we take at 8 weeks. One of our staff will go over the estimate with you and have you sign it prior to the procedure taking place.

### **What about payment plans?**

We use a third party lender called Care Credit. Care Credit offers several different plans. An application can be filled out at our office, online, or by phone. [www.carecredit.com](http://www.carecredit.com)

### **Should I withhold food prior to my pet's appointment?**

Usually before your initial appointment you do not need to withhold food. Of course, there is always an exception. Patients coming from a long way out of town with a special arrangement to have their appointment and diagnostics done on the same day with surgery scheduled for the next day should withhold food. If you are bringing your pet in for surgery or x-rays, please take food away at about 11 o'clock the night



before surgery and limit your pet's water intake the morning of the procedure. If your pet is on special medications (e.g. for thyroid problems) please go ahead and give those meds.

### **My pet was admitted to the hospital, can I visit?**

Visitation can be arranged with the receptionists. If your pet has a straightforward procedure that requires only overnight hospitalization, we generally do not recommend that you visit. This is because the night of surgery, your pet will be sedated with post operative pain medications as well as residual effects from anesthesia. Your pet may also become confused in this state if you were to visit. For pets that are staying with us following a more serious procedure, visitation is welcomed, but should be arranged with the doctor or receptionists.

### **How will my regular vet know what is happening with my pet?**

Our veterinarians communicate directly with your regular vet. We send referral letters to your regular vet that includes information about the exam, diagnosis, recommended procedure, performed procedure, and post operative care.

### **My animal had surgery before. This time it acts much more painful – why?**

Remember that different procedures result in different levels of discomfort after surgery. After a spay, your pet may have appeared absolutely normal the following day. With a more complicated procedure, such as a fracture repair, your pet may experience more discomfort. They may have been under anesthesia for a longer period of time, or the metabolism of your animal may have changed making it more difficult for them to break down the drugs, or other drugs may have been used. Even if your dog had the same procedure on the other side, such as a TPLO, it may still react differently to the second surgery without any ill side-effects.

### **How I know if my animal is in pain after surgery?**

Signs of pain include crying, growling, not wanting to eat, hiding, biting, grimacing (lips are pulled back and the dog looks anxious), tragic facial expression, panting, pacing, restlessness and being unable to sleep. If abdominal surgery was done the pet may not want to lie down on the incision, and might continually sit up in spite of appearing very tired. The worst pain can last 2 to 3 days after surgery.

### **Why is my animal shaking or trembling?**

Commonly animals shake or tremble after surgery as a normal response to the stress of the procedure or being in the hospital, or secondary to other health problems. Shaking does not necessarily imply severe pain,



cold or distress. It may involve the entire body, or just the area of surgery. It is usually most noticeable in the first 5-7 days after surgery, and typically subsides within 1-2 weeks.

### **Panting – is it normal or not?**

Panting is often seen as a result of anxiety or frustration. In many instances following orthopedic surgery, your pet may not be able to move around as freely as before. This can lead to your pet being upset about its limited mobility and lead to panting. We see this often in dogs that have had spinal surgery.

### **What can be done to control pain?**

A variety of pain medications are available for pets. At VSOA we most commonly use anti-inflammatories, such as Rimadyl, Deramaxx, or Metacam. Most animals will also be sent home with Tramadol (a pain medication) and a Fentanyl patch (which manages pain with a morphine derivative absorbed through the skin). Cats frequently are given Buprenorphine.

After surgery, a cold compress (e.g. a bag of frozen peas) can be applied. Put a dry cloth between the skin and the cold pack. Cooling the surgical site helps to numb the area.

Do not give any pain medications to your pet that you may use for yourself. For example, Tylenol given to a cat will likely kill the animal because of significant toxicity!

### **When we got home, I noticed my pet was acting strangely-what could be causing that?**

The most common reason your pet might be acting strangely is the medications-either that were used for anesthesia or that were sent home. The side effect of some medications, such as the Fentanyl patch can include whining, panting, pacing, being nervous, and not wanting to eat. Tramadol can lead to significant drowsiness, lethargy, and drooling. Anti-inflammatories can lead to GI upset, liver or kidney dysfunction. If you are really concerned about the behavior of your pet after surgery, remove the Fentanyl patch first, wait for approximately 20min to one hour, and re-evaluate your animal. If it is not better, please call VSOA, your DVM, or the emergency clinic immediately (see above).

### **What do I do with the incision? Is swelling normal?**

Please do not clean the incision directly or apply hydrogen peroxide or any ointments, unless this is indicated by your doctor or in the post-operative instruction letter. There will be some swelling and redness around the incision when your pet returns home. It will gradually resolve. There may be some irregular areas under the skin around the incision, which may persist for several weeks or months. This is normally due to the suture



material and will go away as it is absorbed into the tissues. Sometimes after surgery, there is an accumulation of fluid that is produced during the healing process, causing a fluid pocket (seroma). This is a non painful condition, and the body will reabsorb the fluid. However if there is excessive redness, pain, discharge, odor, or a foul smell originating from the incision, there may be an infection and the animal should be evaluated as soon as possible.

### **My pet wants to lick the incision. Is that okay?**

Please do not allow your animal to lick the incision. Licking can lead to severe infection, delay the healing process, and potentially life-threatening complications. Believe it or not, your pet can actually remove the sutures by licking leaving you with an open wound and exposed surgical site! Therefore, always leave the Elizabethan-collar (cone) on the head of your animal until you obtain permission from the doctor to remove the collar, usually after the sutures are removed. Nobody likes the e-collar, but it is best for both you and your pet to leave it on.

To stop your pet from licking, the following additional tricks may help: A T- shirt can be used to cover an incision on the chest or front part of the abdomen; gather the waist of the shirt up over the dog's back and wrap an elastic band around this part of the shirt. A bandage or sock can be used to cover an incision on a limb; fasten the top of the sock to the dog's limb with tape. Bitter apple can be applied around the incision; many dogs will continue to lick after application of this topical. Antipsychotic medication is needed in some cases and this should be discussed with a veterinarian. There are also a couple of other types of collars you might be able to find. Many pet stores carry inflatable "donut" type collars and some other vet clinics have the soft e-collars or rigid cervical collars.

### **How do I care for my pet's bandage?**

For pets that go home with bandages, there are some additional things to consider. It is as important to not let your pet chew on the bandage as if the incision were exposed. Please keep your pet's bandage dry. Whenever your pet goes out and it is wet out, it is best to cover the bandage with a plastic bag. You can either tape this bag up or put a sock over it to hold it up. Please do not leave the plastic bag over the bandage when your pet is inside, as this can lead to the bandage getting wet from the inside out. Usually, your pet will have a couple of toes exposed at the end of the bandage. Please monitor the toes, if they appear to be swelling, notify us immediately.

The frequency with which we will need to check your pet's bandage depends on the reason it was placed. If your pet has a bandage on to offer additional stabilization for an orthopedic repair, we like to check those on a weekly basis. If the bandage is in good shape and we do not need to check for bandage sores or take radiographs, we may leave the same one on for several weeks. If the bandage is providing support for an open wound, we usually change these more frequently.



**My pet had an IV catheter, is there anything I need to do to care for that?**

If your pet comes home with a little bandage on one of its legs, this is most likely the site where we placed the I.V. Catheter. This bandage may be removed a couple of hours after your pet gets home. The reason for leaving a bandage on is that the catheter is usually a fairly large gauge and we want to make sure the vein is sealed off before removing pressure. If there is some swelling noted in the foot the catheter was in, it should resolve in a day or two.

**My pet acts like it never had surgery. Can I take him on walks and let him play with my other pets?**

Please keep in mind that the type of surgery your pet had influences the answer to this question. If your pet had any kind of orthopedic surgery it CANNOT return to normal activity until after its 8 week radiographs and the okay from your surgeon. Your pet may be allowed to wander around on one floor of your house at their leisure. However, if you have other pets or if your pet is very energetic, it may be best to keep it in a kennel. Your pet should be on a leash when they go out for a potty break. If you are able to bring your pet in for rehab after the first two weeks, the rehab crew may gradually begin to increase your pet's exercise. However, if your pet is not being regularly seen in rehab, they should not be doing anything fun.

**Can I give my pet a bath when it gets home?**

Do not bathe your pet until all sutures have been removed, or (if there are no sutures) ask your doctor when you can first give a bath after surgery. In general we recommend not bathing your pet for at least two weeks after surgery.

**When should I expect my animal to have the first bowel movement after surgery?**

Many dogs will not have a bowel movement for the first 4 to 5 days after surgery. Reasons that your pet might not have a regular bowel movement immediately after surgery include: being fasted prior to surgery. Many pets do not eat well during their hospital stay. They frequently do not eat well when they go home. They are fed highly digestible food that produces little stool. Pain medication that contains narcotics (such as Morphine, Fentanyl patches, Tramadol) can be constipating. If a pet does not have a bowel movement on the 5th day of being home, a stool softener such as Metamucil can be fed. The dose of Metamucil is 1 tsp per 25 kg mixed in with each meal (canned dog food); feed immediately after mixing, as the Metamucil will gel the food and may make it less palatable.

**My pet has diarrhea – is that from surgery?**

Some animals may be very excited when being in another environment, especially when in the hospital. Most of the time, when an animal has diarrhea after having been in the hospital it is due to stress. However, there are many potential causes. If your pet does not show improvement of diarrhea within the first one to two



days, we highly recommend contacting us, your regular DVM, or an emergency clinic (see above). We do not recommend using over-the-counter medications to treat diarrhea without instructions.

### **My animal won't eat after surgery! What should I do?**

A decreased appetite is not unusual during an illness, after anesthesia, or after surgery. There are several tips we can offer:

Dogs:\* Offer cooked poultry or lean ground beef (drain fat off before feeding). Add some plain pasta, potatoes or white rice. You can try canned dog food; to enhance the flavor sprinkle a very small amount of garlic powder or chicken or beef broth. Try baby food. Special prescription diets are available at VSOA. Hand feeding: Place a small amount of food in the mouth. Warm the food slightly to hand-temperature, as the food will be more aromatic.

Cats:\* Offer smelly foods that contain fish. Try baby food. Try hand feeding with warmed food.

Certain medication can be given to stimulate appetite. Your doctor will be able to give advice. If nothing helps, and your pet is not eating for several days, a feeding tube may need to be placed.

**\*These suggestions are only for animals that are not on a restricted diet!**

### **My pet is vomiting after surgery – why?**

Your pet might be vomiting for a couple of reasons. First of all, your pet may still be under the effects of the anesthesia and this can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days to wear off depending on your pet's metabolism. Secondly, your animal may have consumed a great deal of water when it got home. We recommend giving only small amounts of water. Another common reason for vomiting is that several medications may have some GI-side effect. In this instance, your animal will show drooling or vomiting within 1-2hrs after drug administration. A bland diet, consisting of chicken and rice may help to calm the GI tract down. Feed for 3 days, and then slowly mix regular food in. If vomiting is not getting better after 1 day, please see VSOA, because there may be a more serious problem, such as internal organ failure, or severe inflammation of the abdominal cavity. If your dog is very painful in the belly, please see VSOA, your DVM, or an emergency clinic (see above) immediately.

There could also be inflammation of the esophagus, from acid coming up from the stomach. A bland diet and administration of specific medication may help to prevent these problems. Consult a veterinary health care professional if the regurgitation continues for more than a couple of days.



**My pet isn't urinating normally, is that okay?**

It is normal for your pet to urinate more or less frequently after surgery. You might also notice that your pet seems to have trouble controlling the need to urinate. This is usually temporary. Many pets drink less after returning home, so expect less urination. Some pets may drink more for the first days as some medications may cause your pet to drink and urinate more frequently. Contact our office, your DVM, or an emergency clinic (see above) immediately if any blood is noted in the urine, if straining to urinate is noted or if no urine is noted for more than 18-24hrs.

We hope that this information pamphlet was helpful to help you. Please do not hesitate to call or ask at your next appointment if you have any questions or concerns (see contact information on our homepage).

Your VSOA Team