

Dogs and Anesthesia

What every dog owner should know about dogs and anesthesia before surgery.

The majority of our nation's companion animals will undergo surgery or some other procedure requiring anesthesia at some point in their lives. There are some points for pet owners to understand and consider before their dog goes under anesthesia.

Dr. Rachael Carpenter, a clinical assistant professor in anesthesia and pain management at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital, explains that before a dog's surgery owners should take time to sit down with their veterinarian and ask questions about the procedure and the steps that will be taken to ensure the pet's safety while under anesthesia.

"It is important that the owner trusts the veterinarian and is comfortable with the procedure about to be performed," says Dr. Carpenter. Your veterinarian should be able to answer questions about how your dog's vital signs will be monitored while under anesthesia and who will be responsible for monitoring your dog.

You should also ask about general post-anesthesia care, specifically what signs to look out for at home that would signal that your dog is not recovering normally from anesthesia. Any abnormal behaviors, such as difficulty walking, vomiting, or decreased appetite should be reported immediately to your veterinarian.

As a dog owner you also need to be aware of what services are included in the cost of the procedure. Many veterinarians include services like pain medication, pre-anesthetic blood work, balanced pre-surgery medications, intravenous catheters, fluids during anesthesia, and monitoring during and after the procedure into the general cost of the surgery. If you are finding that there is an extreme price difference between two veterinarians there is usually a reason for that difference.

"While cost is obviously a concern for the majority of pet owners, price shopping is not always the safest thing for your pet when it comes to surgical procedures," explains Dr. Carpenter. "Investigate not only the cost of the surgery, but also the level of care your animal will receive at that clinic."

Unfortunately, even with the highest level of veterinary care with anesthesia comes the risk of serious complications and even death. However, in most cases the benefits of the surgery far outweigh the risks of the anesthesia.

In general the anesthetic mortality rate for the average cat or dog is low, but each animal's risk of complications is different. When scheduling the surgery, if the procedure is elective, the overall health of the animal should also be considered.

Dr. Carpenter advises that if your dog is not feeling well it would be wise to postpone elective procedures until the animal is healthier. Even something as simple as a runny nose or cough can increase the risk of complications under anesthesia as well as a longer post-surgical recovery time.

"You can never take away all risk. The goal is to reduce the amount of anesthetic risk as much as possible by introducing drugs with a wider therapeutic index that are safer for the animal and constantly improving the procedures used for anesthesia monitoring and recovery," Dr. Carpenter explains.

For more information concerning anesthesia for dogs, contact your local veterinarian.

By Sarah Dowling, this article was provided courtesy of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine.