

# What to Expect – Orthopedic Surgery

Foster Hospital for Small Animals is a teaching institution, and students are involved with all phases of the visit, including obtaining the history and performing a physical examination before the patient is seen by the veterinarian. All surgery is performed by the faculty surgeon or orthopedic resident. Regardless of whether you see the faculty surgeon or the resident, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University faculty supervises all decisions and activities for every pet we treat.

Coming for an appointment does not obligate you to having surgery done at Tufts—we are happy to simply discuss surgical options for your pet.

## Preparing for Your Appointment

When possible, please bring copies of any recent lab work, images, and other tests that the referring veterinarian has performed. Also bring a summary referral letter from your veterinarian and all current medications.

Most patients require radiographs; therefore, do not feed your pet on the morning of the appointment, because sedation is necessary before radiographs can be taken. Water on the morning of the appointment is fine.

## Diagnostic Testing

If the available test results are not recent enough or do not provide enough information, we may recommend repeating lab or imaging tests, including:

**Radiographs and computed tomography (CT) scans.** All patients require sedation for radiographs and CT scans (to protect the technical staff from radiation exposure). We use a combination of two different drugs to allow a lower dose of each. The second drug takes a little longer to wear off, and if you take your pet home after the test, he/she may be sleepy or have redness in the eyes. There is no restriction on food after the sedation wears off.

**Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).** If the veterinarian recommends MRI, it may be necessary to schedule a future appointment. MRI requires hospitalization because the patient must be under general anesthesia.

Outpatient radiography or CT takes time and is dependent

upon availability due to hospital-wide scheduling of this department. You may need to wait one or possibly two hours for your pet's procedure. You are welcome to leave the facility during this time; we will call your cell phone number when the procedure is complete.

The orthopedic resident or faculty surgeon and the student will review the test results with you to explain the diagnosis and discuss options, including further diagnostic testing or surgery.

## Discharge After Initial Appointment

If your pet is not hospitalized at the time of the appointment, the veterinarian will complete a discharge form and send a copy to the referring veterinarian.

## Scheduling

Except in emergencies, surgery will NOT be performed on the day of the appointment. It will be performed the following day if scheduling allows, or planned for a future date.

Regardless of when a surgery is scheduled to be performed, it may be delayed if emergency surgeries must be added to the schedule. If a delay occurs, you will be informed as soon as possible, and you will not be responsible for the costs of hospitalization and daily patient care for any extra days.

With rare exceptions, patients must be admitted the day or evening before surgery, not on the morning of surgery. This allows the patient to become acclimated to the hospital, so that he/she is less stressed at the time of surgery, and allows the anesthesia team to examine the patient and formulate an anesthesia plan that is tailored to the patient's needs.

Patients having minor procedures may sometimes be discharged on the day of surgery. However, in most cases, patients will be discharged between one and three days after surgery.

## Cost

When a decision to operate is made, the veterinarian will provide you with an estimate of the total cost of the surgery and hospitalization. You must leave a deposit of 75 percent of the estimate before the surgery can be performed. In general, estimates will assume a routine postoperative course and will not include costs that might be associated with complications, unanticipated findings,

# Cummings

## Veterinary Medical Center

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and so on. Costs not included in the estimate will be your responsibility.

### Hospitalization

If your pet is hospitalized, all leashes and collars will be returned to you. Special requests for feeding (including food you provide) are fine, with the exception of raw diets, which are not permitted. You may provide clothing or bedding for your pet, although we cannot guarantee that such items will be returned due to the likelihood of soiling and the bulk processing of laundry.

### Communication

While your pet is in the hospital, we will contact you at least once per day, usually in the morning. If there are any problems or concerns, we will contact you IMMEDIATELY (24/7). Usually the veterinary student will call you after patient rounds, where the patient's situation is discussed as a group under the supervision of the resident or faculty veterinarian. If you wish to speak directly with the veterinarian, please let the student know and you will be called back.

After the surgery is over, any necessary postoperative radiographs have been taken, and your pet has recovered from the anesthesia, the resident or faculty veterinarian will call you to report on the results. If the veterinarian is not immediately available, it is possible that the student will call first to advise you about when to expect their call.

### Postoperative Care

Postoperative care in the hospital may include analgesics and/or anti-inflammatory drugs, and antibiotics as needed. Depending upon the admitting problem, physical therapy may be started within a day or two.

Discharge from the hospital depends on patient comfort as well as ease of performing the physical therapy. We will discuss home care with you and answer your questions about how to take care of your pet during their recovery at home.

### Discharge After Hospitalization

When your pet is ready to be released, we will provide you with a set of detailed patient care instructions. Please make a discharge appointment during daytime business hours so that the instructions can be fully explained by the student in charge of the patient. If you cannot make an appointment during business hours, a technician will be assigned the discharge (some gaps in information may occur under these circumstances).

The discharging student or technician will demonstrate the physical therapy techniques to you, and ask you to demonstrate the techniques as well. Some patients will be discharged with a bandage, splint or cast. Instructions for care of the bandage will be provided. The bandage must be changed IMMEDIATELY: if it becomes wet or develops an odor

or discharge, if it is chewed, if redness is observed, if toes swell (nails spread apart), if the bandage slips (can no longer observe toes) or if the incision is exposed. Successful healing after orthopedic surgery requires the patient to rest. ALL patients will be discharged with some degree of exercise restriction, commonly for a minimum of 6 to 8 weeks.

Restrictions include:

- No running or jumping
- No stairs; if stairs must be used, assist your pet with a sling
- Go outside on a leash only to eliminate
- Stay on non-slip (carpeted) surfaces inside
- If left alone, a dog should be placed in a crate (large enough to stand and turn around)

### Questions After Discharge

If you have ANY questions after discharge, please call the hospital (surgery liaison: Leslie Anderson, X84794). Our response may be delayed depending on the veterinarian's schedule, but your question will be answered that day.

### Follow-up Appointments

We suggest that you make follow-up appointments as soon as possible after the initial hospitalization and discharge, as these appointment slots fill up quickly.

All surgeries require suture removal; this is performed here at no charge. Your regular veterinarian can also remove the sutures.

Most orthopedic cases require follow-up radiographs; this imaging should be performed here to allow us to fully assess the patient and address any issues that may have developed. Costs for these follow-up visits include a nominal re-evaluation fee, sedation for radiographs, and the radiographs themselves. All follow-up visits other than suture removal include the possibility of radiographs; as before, do not feed your pet on the morning of the visit because sedation is required.

As with the initial visit, follow-up visits will start with a senior veterinary student. If there are no concerns, the student will take the patient directly to radiology; if there are any concerns or if you want to speak with a veterinarian, simply request a resident or faculty member to join the discussion. In all cases, the resident or faculty veterinarian will discuss with you the follow-up radiographic findings and further care and evaluation. A summary of every visit will be faxed (email if available) to the listed referring veterinarian.

### Questions During Convalescence

If you have ANY questions during the convalescent period, please call the hospital at (508) 839-5395. It is best to catch any problems early because later they may be more difficult to treat.