



## Pre- and Post-Surgery Information for Caregivers

By bringing cats to Catnippers for sterilization, you are helping to lessen the burden of cat overpopulation in Los Angeles. You are making a huge difference in these cats' lives and within the community!

The combination of being trapped and then having surgery is an incredibly stressful experience for the cat. Your diligence, monitoring, and following instructions closely will allow you to provide the best possible care for the cat while he/she is being fixed.

### PRE-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS

#### **NO FOOD AFTER MIDNIGHT:**

**If a cat eats after midnight, it poses a serious surgery risk for the cat.** If cats have eaten after midnight, they can vomit while under anesthesia and possibly die. If they do vomit while under anesthesia, they are at high risk of developing pneumonia a week later.

**Kittens four months or younger are the only exception to this rule.** Kittens this young cannot go without food as long as adult cats can because their blood sugar levels will get too low. For kittens four months or younger, wet food should be available to them *up until the morning of surgery*. Canned food is 78% water, so it is preferable to use it instead of dry food, particularly if water is not available.

To feed a cat through the trap, **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO OPEN THE TRAP TO PLACE FOOD IN.** Instead, you can set the entire trap on top of some additional newspaper and then drop a little wet food in through the top of the trap (careful not to hit the cat). Or you can put some wet food on a square of aluminum foil and set the trap on it, so that the food squishes up through the bottom bars of the trap.

#### **HOLDING CATS THE NIGHT BEFORE SURGERY:**

**PLEASE READ OUR "SAFE HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION INSTRUCTIONS" FOR PROPER INFORMATION ON PROPER HOLDING AREAS.**

**Trapped cats must be covered at all times with a trap cover, towel or blanket – as soon as they are trapped.** This includes keeping them covered when you house them overnight, when you transport them to and from the clinic, and while they are at the clinic. Use a material cover, **NO PLASTIC.**

**Make sure your holding area is a safe, indoor location.** Examples are laundry rooms, bathrooms, heated/ventilated enclosed patios, etc. Garages or sheds work as long as the temperature outside is mild. If you're holding cats in a garage or a shed, make sure you can lock it securely. **DO NOT LEAVE THE TRAPPED CATS OUTSIDE OVERNIGHT OR IN YOUR YARD UNSECURED.**

**Regulate the temperature. Warm up your holding area in the winter and cool it off in the summer.** The temperature should be moderate, not extreme, at all times. When the weather heats up outside, the temperature in garages, storage rooms, laundry rooms and other enclosed areas may rise to intolerable levels quickly. Heat stroke can happen very quickly. Likewise, during colder weather, these areas may be unheated, drafty or exposed. Make sure you regulate the temperature so that it's moderate at all times. In the summer, cool down your holding area with fans and proper ventilation. In the winter, make sure there is adequate heating. Remember, if it's not comfortable for you, it's even less comfortable for the cat.

**Make sure there is adequate ventilation!** This sounds like common sense, but if a holding area is too small, stuffy, or cramped and there is not enough ventilation, your cats are in jeopardy of dying. Likewise, if you have too many blankets on the traps to keep them warm, your cats may not be getting enough air. Be extremely cautious that your holding area provides adequate ventilation for your cats.

**If two or more cats are trapped in one trap, DO NOT attempt to separate them.** Instead, bring enough empty traps into the clinic with you so that each cat can go home in his/her own individual trap after surgery. Make sure you bring a cover for each trap, too. If you do not have enough empty traps, still bring the kitties into the clinic the day of surgery as Catnippers may be able to provide some to you, depending on availability, and at the very least bring enough extra carriers for each cat to go home in.

## POST-SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS

When you arrive to pick up your cats, the discharge coordinator will inform you of each cat's sex, estimated age, medical services performed and any special instructions or medications. Please make sure you understand any special instructions concerning post-surgery treatment.

### **HOLDING CATS THE NIGHT AFTER SURGERY:**

**Cats will still be recovering from anesthesia when you pick them up.** General anesthesia will cause cats (especially kittens) to become hypothermic, or very cool with a low body temperature. It is imperative that they be kept in a warm, draft-free environment during their recovery. Keep their traps or carriers covered, as that will help keep them warm. Cats also receive **pain medication and an antibiotic** while they are at Catnippers.

**Make sure that the temperature of your holding area is moderate, not extreme, at all times.** When the weather heats up, the temperature in garages, storage rooms and/or vehicles may rise to intolerable levels. The same applies to extremely cold weather, as holding areas may be unheated, drafty or exposed. Please use common sense and good judgment in selecting your holding area, and use caution while transporting to/from the clinic.

### **FEEDING:**

**After the cat or kitten is sufficiently awake, canned, wet food should be provided.** This is usually sometime between 6:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. after surgery, depending on the cat. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO OPEN THE TRAP TO PLACE FOOD IN.** Instead, you can set the entire trap on top of some additional newspaper and then drop a little wet food in through the top of the trap (careful not to hit the cat). Or you can put some wet food on a square of aluminum foil and set the trap on it, so that the food squishes up through the bottom bars of the trap.

Using wet food is preferable over dry food since it is 78% water and it further hydrates the cat. All cats do receive subcutaneous fluids (under the skin) while at Catnippers, so between the wet food and the sub-Q fluids, they should be hydrated enough that you don't need to stick additional water dishes in the trap.

It is optimal to have the cats released with a full stomach, which will aid in their recovery and ultimately reduce the stress on them. Don't be surprised if the cat will not eat in a trap – only 50% to 60% of cats will. But at least we can try!

**Monitor the cats periodically during the night to make sure the recovery appears normal.**

Watch to make sure there is no bleeding or discharge from the surgery area. When you check on the cat, just peek in under the trap cover so the cat isn't fully exposed. *Stitches do not need to be removed.*

**Normal behaviors that occur during initial recovery** include deep sleep, lethargy, slightly wobbly movements and panting. Slight bleeding from the right ear tip may occur.

**Abnormal behaviors** include continued bleeding or discharge from the surgery area, vomiting, dilated eyes, continued wobbliness, fast breathing or shivering the next morning. If any of these symptoms are occurring in the morning, the cat should not be released and needs to see a vet immediately.

If you have concerns about a cat that is slow to recover, has an incision complication, or is demonstrating any other problems post-surgery, **call Catnippers immediately at (818) 524-2287** – and explain your problem. Catnippers will treat, at our clinic, any post-op complications resulting directly from the surgery, if all post-surgery instructions have been followed. Your regular veterinarian must address illnesses or injuries that are not a direct result of surgery.

**IF ABNORMAL BEHAVIORS CONTINUE AND CATNIPPERS IS CLOSED, DO NOT RELEASE THE CAT; INSTEAD, THE CAT SHOULD BE TAKEN TO A VETERINARIAN OR ANIMAL EMERGENCY CLINIC IMMEDIATELY.** If this occurs, please follow up with your Catnippers contact immediately.

#### **RELEASING:**

If all cats appear normal, then the cats should be released **THE MORNING AFTER SURGERY** in the exact location where you trapped them.

**THE CATS DO NOT NEED TO BE HELD ANY LONGER THAN THE MORNING AFTER SURGERY, AS THE LONGER THEY ARE HELD IN THE TRAP THE MORE STRESS THEY WILL HAVE DUE TO BEING IN CAPTIVITY.** Even with the females, you can release them the next morning.

It is important to remember that while the Trap/Neuter/Return program is critical to the ultimate well-being of the cats we treat, the process is very stressful for them. Being in captivity is very stressful for them. Also, part of the stress involves the lengthy period of time that some of the cats go without food during the entire trapping process. Holding them longer to recover stretches this out even further, so make sure to **RELEASE THE MORNING AFTER SURGERY.**

Many times the released cats do not show up at the feeding station until 1-2 days later, so don't be concerned if you don't see them right away. They generally come around after they are feeling better.

**The only exception to this rule is for lactating females. Lactating females MUST BE released the same evening after surgery, so they can get back to their nursing kittens.** Kittens need to nurse every 2-4 hours so we want to reunite the mom with her kittens as soon as possible after surgery, provided the mom is fully recovered. The mother will still be able to nurse her kittens after surgery without causing any problems – either to the suture area or to the kittens. The Catnippers volunteers will advise you if your cat is a lactating female who needs to be immediately released.