

For your peace of mind

Pet owner's guide to
small animal anaesthesia



For your peace of mind

Pet owner's guide to small animal anaesthesia



This leaflet has been designed to give you more information about what happens to your pet should he or she require an anaesthetic. The aim is to provide you with the facts and to make the waiting less stressful. We believe it is always easier for you and your pet when you know what to expect. Please read on to find out more about small animal anaesthesia.







What is anaesthesia?

Anaesthesia is, according to its definition, “a state of unconsciousness produced by anaesthetic agents, with absence of pain sensation over the entire body and a greater or lesser degree of muscular relaxation”.

What is an anaesthetic?

Anaesthetics are drugs, given by injection or when an animal breathes them in, to make the animal unconscious and to relieve pain. Veterinary surgeons use anaesthetics every day to enable them perform different procedures on their patients.

Why would my pet need an anaesthetic?

From time to time your pet may need an anaesthetic for your vet to gain more information about a disease or to correct a problem. Although your vet can collect a lot of information by asking you lots of questions and examining your pet, an anaesthetic may be needed for taking x-rays or performing other procedures, which may include surgery.

What shall I do before I bring my pet in?

You will usually be asked to withhold food from your pet before the procedure. This is necessary because a full stomach may make your pet more liable to vomiting during initial and final stages of anaesthesia.

In addition, if the animal is anaesthetised it may not be able to swallow and it could inhale bits of food, which can block the airway or cause infection in the lungs. A very full stomach can also press onto the diaphragm, making it harder to breathe depending on how the animal needs to be positioned.

Water does not usually have to be withheld, but your vet will give you more specific advice.





Safety of veterinary anaesthetics and anaesthesia

Although all anaesthetic procedures carry a small risk, the risk is especially low in healthy animals and veterinary surgeons may perform a number of tests to minimise this risk even further.

Pre-anaesthetic examination

Your pet will always be examined by your vet prior to having an anaesthetic. This is done in order to minimise the potential anaesthetic risk or risks linked to having surgery. As a result of this examination, your vet may decide to perform a number of specific tests. The most commonly performed tests are blood and urine tests. These tests can help your vet pick up some additional problems which may increase the risk of anaesthesia, such as kidney and liver problems, anaemia or diabetes.

Monitoring the patient closely during an anaesthetic procedure

Patient monitoring is an important part of giving an anaesthetic. During anaesthesia, a member of staff will monitor your pet's heart and breathing rate. It is also possible to measure the oxygen content of the blood and the heart's electrical activity. The vet will pick the anaesthetic procedure best suited to your pet's age, condition and any underlying disease.

What should I do after the anaesthetic / surgical procedure?

After collecting the animal it is best to keep them somewhere familiar, quiet and warm so you can check on their progress without disturbing them, unless advised otherwise. Usually you can offer a light meal after a few hours but do not be too worried if their appetite is not back to normal immediately. Follow carefully any instructions you have been given by your vet and do not hesitate to call your veterinary surgery if you have any concerns.



What happens during anaesthesia?

After examining the patient and choosing the most suitable anaesthetic protocol, according to your pet's age and state of their health, your veterinary surgeon will begin anaesthetising your pet.

Most anaesthetic procedures usually consist of four different stages, although some procedures may be performed without the first phase.

1

Pre-anaesthetic medication

Premedicants are drugs given to your pet before anaesthesia and also help the vet to start the next phase. Pain-killing drugs are given during this pre-medication phase.

2

Induction phase - introduction of anaesthesia

Injectable anaesthetic agents are given to your pet via the vein or muscle. As a result, your pet becomes unconscious. This is the start of another phase of the anaesthetic process - the maintenance phase.

3

Maintenance phase - maintaining anaesthesia

Anaesthetic gases and vapours are used during the maintenance phase. Some practices may decide to use injectable anaesthetics instead. This mostly depends on the practice, nature and health of your pet. If an endotracheal tube is passed into the trachea, anaesthetic gases are delivered from an anaesthetic machine, which provides a mixture of anaesthetic gases and vaporised drugs.

4

Recovery phase - waking up after anaesthesia

An animal will usually wake up very soon after the anaesthesia is stopped. The patient is monitored until they are completely awake and able to walk. Some animals may stay in the recovery room for a while, but this usually occurs if an animal has had a more complicated surgery and further monitoring is required.

A smiling man with glasses and a beard is holding a golden retriever puppy. The man is wearing a white lab coat and a green stethoscope. The puppy is looking towards the camera with its tongue out. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Medication phase:

Drugs that reduce the patient's anxiety and use less anaesthetic drug during the procedure. Sedative drugs may also be given during the

Local anaesthesia:

Local anaesthetics are the most commonly used. These drugs are injected into your pet's skin on the front of the foreleg. As your pet becomes anaesthetised and passes into the maintenance phase, an anaesthetic procedure, called the

General anaesthesia:

Volatile anaesthetics are most commonly used in the maintenance phase, although some vets may use injectable anaesthetic agents. The choice depends on anaesthetic protocols used, the length and duration of the procedure, age and health. If an inhaled anaesthetic is used, a tube (endotracheal tube) is placed in the windpipe and connected to an anaesthetic machine which supplies the mixture of different gases directly to the patient.

Recovery from anaesthesia:

Your pet will start to recover from anaesthesia as the anaesthesia is stopped. The recovery of your pet should be monitored carefully until your pet is fit enough to go home. Some pets may stay in the veterinary practice for a bit longer; this is especially true if an animal has had either a long or complex surgical process or if continued



What the experts say

Advice from
Mark Senior

BVSc CertVA DipIECVA MRCVS,

**Lecturer in Veterinary Anaesthesia,
University of Liverpool Veterinary School:**

“Anaesthesia is an important part of every-day life in a vet practice. All vets are experienced in administering anaesthetics. Just as in people, there is a very small risk associated with anaesthesia in any animal. In some animals the risk can be greater if they are ill, very young, or very old. Your vet will do everything they can to minimise this risk and it is important that you listen carefully to any instructions they give you and follow them. Any risk of anaesthesia is always outweighed by the benefit of doing the procedure; otherwise your vet would not recommend it. I hope this leaflet helps you to understand what happens to your pet when they have an anaesthetic. If you are not sure of something - ask your vet!”





 **Vétoquinol**
Signe de Passion

This leaflet has been produced by
Vetoquinol UK Limited, the supplier of:

Alfaxan[®]
anesthesia you can trust

For further information please consult your veterinary surgeon.