

Care of the newborn puppies or kittens



The puppies or kittens should be ready to feed by the time you arrive home. It is important that new born animals receive the 'first milk' or colostrum within a few hours of birth. It contains antibodies to protect them against disease, as well as being lower in fat and higher in protein than ordinary milk.



If they have already received this by suckling at the veterinary practice before collection then the veterinary surgeon or nurse will advise you of this. If the mother does not appear to have enough milk, then you may need to supplement the puppies or kittens with a milk replacer.

Summary

Caesarean surgery in the bitch or queen is usually carried out in circumstances where a normal birth is not possible.

Particular care of both the mother and the young will be required immediately after surgery so it is important to follow the simple points mentioned in this leaflet.

If you have any concerns at all following the caesarean operation speak to a veterinary surgeon or nurse for advice.



XLVets Small Animal member veterinary practices work together to share experience, knowledge and ideas to ensure the highest levels of quality and care for their client's pets. XLVet member practices provide a compassionate and caring service for all pets and at the same time offer comprehensive and up-to-date treatment in all fields of veterinary medicine and surgery.



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CAESAREAN SURGERY IN YOUR CAT OR DOG



This leaflet is designed to help you understand what happens if your cat or dog needs to have a caesarean and how to care for them afterwards.

Why may my cat or dog need a caesarean?

As with human patients it is generally usual for an animal to have their young naturally. In some cases however, surgery may be required to ensure a safe delivery. Sometimes a caesarean may be performed as an elective or pre-planned procedure but in the majority of cases it is carried out as an emergency.

Two examples of when a caesarean may be required rather than a natural birth:

1. Specific breeds: Some breeds of cat and dog are more prone to requiring surgery than others. This is often the cases in breeds such as Bulldogs and Persian cats that have quite broad heads.
2. Unproductive contractions: if the mother is taking an excessive amount of time to produce the puppy or kitten and there is no response to medical stimulants.

Caesarean surgery

In cats and dogs the mother is always given a general anaesthetic for the surgery. Care is taken to ensure that as little anaesthetic medication as possible passes to the puppies or kittens during this procedure.

The wound following the surgery will in the majority of cases be along the midline between the two rows of nipples

After surgery, the anaesthetic effects usually wear off very quickly however, the speed at which this happens will depend very much on the health of the mother and the reason for the caesarean.

Post-operative care immediately following surgery

In the majority of cases the intention of the vet will always be to get mother and babies back into a familiar environment as quickly as possible. The following list gives some tips for care once you have settled them back at home:

- Your pet may be a little groggy for a few hours following surgery even though they are able to walk about almost normally. Do not leave the mother and new babies together unsupervised until she is fully co-ordinated and awake. Once the mother is up and about she can be offered something to drink and a light meal.
- Keep the new puppies or kittens warm and allow their fur to dry thoroughly using a heat mat or covered hot water bottle. This is especially important until the mother is able to start nursing them herself. Newborn animals are not able to regulate their temperature very well so the area immediately surrounding them should be kept warm for example with a heat lamp.
- A bloody vaginal discharge is normal following delivery of the puppies or kittens. It can often be quite heavy for several days. Your vet will arrange for a post-operative check a few days after surgery to confirm that everything is progressing normally. If the discharge persists for more than a week, changes colour or develops an unpleasant odour, contact the surgery for further advice.



Care of the bitch or queen over the next few days

Wound care:

It is important that you check the caesarean wound every day until it is healed. Collars and t-shirts to prevent interference are generally not used in these cases so careful monitoring of the area is essential. Excessive licking can slow down wound healing and introduce infection to the area. Any developing redness, heat, swelling or discharge should be considered abnormal and warrants a visit to the surgery.

Stitches may or may not need to be removed. This depends on the type of material used. As a general rule if the stitches are visible, they are removed 10-14 days following surgery.

Medication:

If medication has been dispensed the whole course must be completed unless otherwise directed by your veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse. The medication will be explained to you when your pet is sent home and administration details will be on the label.

Feeding:

After giving birth, the mother's food intake will need to increase to ensure she is able to maintain her bodyweight and produce enough milk. It is important that she is fed a good quality puppy or kitten food during her period of nursing to provide her with sufficient calcium and energy intake. In most cases this same diet can be used for the young when they are weaned.