

## Post-Surgery Recovery Care for Feral Cats

When you pick up a cat after spay-neuter surgery, we will discharge the cat to you in the trap in which it arrived. The cat will be fully awake, but may not be fully alert. Plan to keep the cat in the trap during recovery. We will provide a record of care given, including verification of spay-neuter, rabies vaccination and any additional services.

**After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight.** After surgery, there may be a few drops of blood on the paper in the bottom of the cage. This is normal. When you get home, place the covered trap in the recovery area and leave the cat alone for a little while.

Keep the cats indoors in their covered traps and make sure they are dry, in a temperature-controlled environment, and away from loud noises or dangers such as toxic fumes, other animals or people. When cats are recovering from anesthesia, they're unable to regulate their body temperature. It is important to keep them from getting too hot or cold. If you feel you cannot provide appropriate recovery accommodations, let us know; we may be able to assist.

**Keep cats until they recover.** Cats usually need to be kept for 12 hours after surgery, depending on recovery speed. Before release, make sure cats are fully conscious, clear-eyed, alert, eating and drinking, and there are no signs of infection (discharge, bleeding, or swelling). If the cat seems lethargic beyond the first day, or if you notice any of the above signs, please give us a call.

Male cats and often females can be returned to the trapping site 12 hours following surgery, as long as they are fully awake and do not require further medical attention. Females may need 24 hours, depending on their specific circumstances. Once they completely regain consciousness, return nursing mothers as soon as possible to their kittens.

**Prepare the holding area ahead of time.** The area should be quiet, sheltered, dry, temperature-controlled and off-limits to other animals. Place a plastic tarp, absorbent towel or multiple layers of newspaper underneath the trap to absorb urine or spilled water.

Keep traps covered to reduce the cats' stress. Never open trap doors or allow cats out of the trap. Do not stick your fingers through the bars or attempt to handle the cats.

**Feed the cat once or twice a day during the holding period.** In the evening after surgery, offer food. Cover one end of the trap with a heavy sheet or blanket to give the cat a safe, dark space to hide in. The cat will usually move to the end of the trap away from you, but always be cautious when opening the trap door. Open the trap door no more than one or two inches and slip in a couple of small plastic or paper dishes. Place them so they can be refilled with dry food and water from outside the trap. Make sure both trap doors are securely shut and latched. If necessary, dishes can be moved around with blunt sticks. Do not use anything sharp that could injure the cat.

**Note:** The cat might not urinate or defecate during the first day or two of recovery. This is normal.

**Return the cats.** Release cats in the same place they were trapped. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. Or, if the trap has a rear door, pull the cover away from the back door, pull that door up and off, remove the cover and walk away. Don't be concerned if a cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. It is simply reorienting itself. Sometimes a cat "disappears" for a few days after it is returned. It will reappear eventually. Resume the feeding schedule and continue to provide food and water.

**Thoroughly clean the traps.** Whether traps are borrowed or your own, they should be cleaned with a nontoxic disinfectant before being stored. Even traps that appear clean must be disinfected because the scent of the previous cat can deter other cats from entering a trap.

**Note:** Traps rented from the San Francisco SPCA Community Cat Program **must be returned clean or a \$20 cleaning fee will be charged.**