

Post-Surgery Recovery Care

After spay/neuter surgery, feral cats should be kept in a safe location and monitored for approximately 24-36 hours until they are ready to be returned to their habitats. The holding period may be longer if any complications were encountered during surgery.

Do not let the cat loose in your house or attempt to transfer her to another cage. Transferring is difficult and if the cat gets loose, you cannot properly monitor her recovery. If you expect an especially lengthy holding period due to medical complications, call The SF/SPCA Lifeline for Feral Cats for advice.

Prepare the holding area ahead of time. A garage, extra room, bathroom, basement, or laundry room can work well. The area should be quiet, sheltered, and off-limits to any other animals. It must also be warm and dry. Following are guidelines for post-surgery care:

- Prop the trap up on bricks, chairs or anything to raise it off the floor a few inches. Make sure it is stable and sturdy.
- Underneath the trap, place a disposable tray with a little kitty litter in it or a piece of plastic topped with newspaper. This will absorb any urine or spilled water.
- The cat may be groggy after surgery, but should be fully awake by the evening. There may be a few drops of blood on the paper in the bottom of the cage, but that is normal. When you get home, place the covered trap in the recovery area and leave the cat alone for a little while.
- That evening, offer the cat food. Open the trap door one to two inches and slip in a couple of small plastic or paper dishes. You can refill them with dry food and water from outside the trap.
- Make sure both trap doors are securely shut and latched. The cat will usually move to the end of the trap away from you, but always be cautious when opening the trap door.
- If necessary, dishes can be moved around with blunt sticks. Do not use anything sharp that could injure the cat.
- Feed the cat once or twice a day during the holding period.

Recovery and Release

- Males generally need 24 hours to recover and females a little longer. You want to be sure that the cat is eating and drinking, and that there are no signs of infection (discharge from surgery site, bleeding, or swelling).
- If the cat seems lethargic beyond the first day, or if you notice any of the above signs, the cat should be brought back to clinic to be rechecked.
- The cat might not urinate or defecate during the first day or two of the holding period. This is normal.
- Once the cat is eating, is alert, and has clear eyes, he can be returned to his colony habitat. Try to release the cat as close as possible to where you trapped him, and choose a time of day when fewer people will be in the area.

San Francisco SPCA Resources

- Fact sheets including "The Care and Feeding of Feral Cats," "Humane Trapping," "Basic Kitten Care," and more.
- Feral Cat Video Series.
- Lifeline for Feral Cats (415) 554-3071. We can provide advice specific to your situation.
- The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program provides free spay/neuter for San Francisco feral cats, no appointment necessary.