



Orchard Road Veterinary Surgery, Inc
A Mobile Small Animal Veterinary Surgical Service

Common Surgical Complications

Complications related to general surgical procedure:

Excessive swelling and bruising at the surgical site: There is usually some degree of swelling and bruising associated with any surgical incision. This usually reaches the maximum extent by 2 to 3 days after surgery and should then regress. If the bruising is worsening or if it involves the majority of the incision and surrounding skin then contact your veterinarian to check the site.

Opening of the incision (dehiscence): The loss of the skin sutures or staples can occur from mechanical trauma if the pet is allowed to lick the site (infection may also occur) or if there is too much tension on the wound closure due to the site where the incision is located or excessive movement of the patient. If only a few sutures are lost, but the skin edges remain apposed then there is no concern. Do not let your pet lick or scratch the area. If the incision begins to gape open more than a centimeter or drain fluid from an opening then you should contact your veterinarian.

Seroma formation – accumulation of serum underneath the incision: Seromas occur because the watery component of the blood or serum accumulates in the spaces left after opening skin and subcutaneous tissues, especially if a mass has been removed. This is a benign complication and most often the fluid will be resorbed by the body. However the swelling can become large at times or may drain through the incision, creating a mess and risking development of an infection. To help speed the resolution of a seroma, confine your pet and limit their activity and movement, prevent them from licking the site and you can also apply warm compresses to the area to encourage resorption of the fluid by the body. If the swelling is increasing or begins to drain contact your veterinarian.

Infection: Bacterial infection of an incision will cause increased swelling, pain, and formation of pus, an opaque, often yellowish thick discharge. You may also feel warmth and tenderness at the incision. Your pet may not feel well, not want to eat or seem to be in more discomfort. If any of these signs occur contact your veterinarian.

Complications related to an orthopedic repair (bone or joint surgery)

Persistent lameness – after an orthopedic surgery your pet should begin to put weight back on the operated limb within a few days of surgery. Their gait and use of that limb may take weeks to return to normal, but there should be gradual improvement. If your pet is constantly holding the leg off the ground after more than 3 or 4 days there may be a problem or your pet may be more sensitive to pain than anticipated. Please contact your veterinarian.

Sudden change in use of a limb – If your pet has been weight bearing on the operated limb, but then suddenly stops using it or appears to be more sensitive about bearing weight on it then they had been then something may have occurred at the surgery site to cause discomfort. This may be as simple as an increase in inflammation or a soft tissue strain from too much activity. This should resolve with strict rest and continued analgesic medication. A more serious reason for sudden change in use of the operated limb may be due to a problem with the repair. This could include something at the surgery site shifting out of position or becoming loose. Serious changes may require additional surgery. Contact your veterinarian if a sudden change in use of the limb occurs so that the limb can be reevaluated. A radiograph may be required to evaluate the repair.