



Southern Counties

VETERINARY
SPECIALISTS

Sedation & General Anaesthesia

Information Sheet

**Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists
Specialist Referral Service**



but they should be allowed access to water until you leave the house to bring them to the practice. No fluids other than water (e.g. milk) should be allowed after midnight. This period of fasting is essential to reduce the risk of vomiting during sedation/anaesthesia with subsequent inhalation of stomach contents into the lung, which could cause a very severe pneumonia. If your animal is currently on any medication, the SCVS clinician you are seeing will advise whether these should be given on the morning of the procedure, or should be withheld.

Sedation

When we give drugs for sedation prior to anaesthesia, this is referred to as premedication (or 'the premed'). Some sedative drugs can last a few hours and your pet may be sleepy afterwards. Again, this helps to reduce anxiety whilst in our care and also promotes rest after a surgical procedure. You may hear that some sedative drugs are not suitable for certain breeds of dogs and cats, and this is commonly perpetuated by various chat rooms on the internet. This is untrue in the majority of cases: side effects of

General anaesthesia is virtually always required in dogs and cats undergoing surgery. However, as we can't explain to your pet to keep still for a CT scan, or to take a deep breath for an x-ray, it is likely that sedation or general anaesthesia will be necessary for many other more minor procedures too. There is always a risk associated with any sedative or anaesthetic, but in healthy dogs and cats this risk is extremely small. It is, however, perfectly natural for an owner to be anxious about this. To minimise the possibility of anything going wrong, SCVS employ Specialist veterinary anaesthetists who oversee a large team of highly qualified staff. Our Specialists have undergone many years of training and examinations to ensure competence at a very high level, equivalent to that of a Consultant human anaesthetist.

Preparation of your pet for sedation/ general anaesthesia

We generally recommend that your pet is starved from midnight the night before any planned sedative or anaesthetic procedure,

How sedation helps

- Helps to relieve anxiety
- Reduces the dose of other sedative and anaesthetic drugs required
- Improves the overall quality of the anaesthetic
- Keeps your pet calm during awakening after the procedure
- Provides pain relief
- Facilitates minor procedures such as ultrasound, radiography (x-rays) or dressing changes

these drugs are dependent on the dose given, the health of the animal, existing medication and any further drugs administered. Be assured that your pet will undergo a thorough pre-anaesthetic assessment by experienced staff before being administered any drugs, and our Specialist anaesthetists are well-qualified to select those that are most appropriate. Please trust our experience over what you may read on Google!

General anaesthesia

General anaesthesia is a state of controlled unconsciousness produced by administering anaesthetic drugs. In most cases, sedatives (premedicants) are given shortly before anaesthesia, mainly to make your dog or cat less anxious about what is going on. Once the animal is relaxed, anaesthesia is induced, usually by giving an injection into a vein, most commonly in one of the legs, but occasionally

into ear veins in dogs with floppy ears (e.g. Basset Hounds). It is necessary for us to clip hair around the vein we are going to use before the area is cleaned and an intravenous cannula is placed. This cannula (a thin tube) allows us to administer both drugs and fluids throughout the anaesthetic, and into the post-operative period. Much like humans, some animals have 'difficult' veins, so occasionally we may have to clip over more than one vein before we find a suitable one. Once the anaesthetic induction drugs have been administered intravenously and your pet is unconscious, anaesthesia is usually maintained by a different drug (a gas) given through a tube inserted through the mouth into the trachea ('windpipe') for the rest of the anaesthetic. Passage of this endotracheal tube can occasionally cause some animals to have a mild sore throat or slight cough for a few days after anaesthesia. However, if you are concerned at all, you should contact your veterinary surgeon



or the clinician you are dealing with at SCVS.

Depending on the procedure to be performed, your pet may have a 'nerve block' to help with pain management during the procedure and afterwards. This may involve an injection in the back (epidural or spinal) or around the nerves providing sensation to the surgical site. These techniques necessitate clipping of fur in these areas but benefit your pet in terms of pain management and post-operative comfort. During the anaesthetic, a Specialist anaesthetist or anaesthetic nurse will be with your pet at all times. A monitor will be attached that allows us to measure things like heart rate, blood pressure, oxygenation and breathing rate. This allows us to detect problems early and deal with them appropriately. Once the procedure is completed, the gas is turned off and the patient regains

consciousness whilst being closely monitored.

As general anaesthetics can affect memory and co-ordination, you may notice your pet is a little sleepier for a couple of days afterwards. However, most patients regain normal activity very quickly. Your pet's appetite may also be affected but should be back to normal quickly. Unless otherwise advised, we recommend you offer only a light meal on the evening that your animal has had an anaesthetic.

Sedation vs. general anaesthesia

There is a tendency for owners to think that sedation is somehow safer for their pet than general anaesthesia. This is not necessarily the case and particularly with brachycephalic ('squashed-nose') breeds, such as Persian cats, Pugs and Bulldogs, general anaesthesia is usually safer than deep sedation. This is because these animals have very abnormal airway conformation and when sedated, commonly develop airway obstruction and are unable to breathe but are generally still too awake for the anaesthetist to 'take control' of their airway. Under general anaesthesia the anaesthetist can pass a tube into the animal's windpipe to maintain a patent airway. Similarly, general anaesthesia is sometimes chosen over sedation in 'sicker' animals as it allows the anaesthetist to have greater control over the patient's breathing and circulation. Our experienced anaesthesia Specialists will always make an informed judgement as to whether sedation or anaesthesia is best for your pet.

If you have concerns about sedation or general anaesthesia, please discuss these with your vet during the consultation.





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