

Post-Operative Incision Care 101

A Guide for Your Pet's Recovery

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Incision Care 101: Keeping Your Pet Clean, Safe, and Comfortable

Your pet has had surgery, and your most important job during recovery is to protect the incision. A clean, protected incision heals faster and helps prevent complications. Please follow these guidelines closely.

The Golden Rule: Prevent Licking and Chewing!

Your pet's mouth contains bacteria that can cause a serious infection. Licking can also pull out stitches and re-open the incision.

- **The E-Collar ("Cone") is Not Optional:** The cone must be worn **at all times** unless you are directly supervising your pet. This includes overnight. A typical cone should extend 2 inches past your pet's nose.
 - **Alternatives:** For some body locations, a surgical recovery suit (like a baby's onesie) may be an option. Please discuss this with your veterinarian first.
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Your Daily Incision Checklist

Check the incision **twice a day** (morning and evening) for the next 10-14 days.

What's NORMAL (Signs of Healing):

- **Clean and Dry:** The incision should have no discharge.
- **Slight Redness & Swelling:** A small amount of pinkness and swelling at the edges is normal for the first few days.
- **Minor Bruising:** Some bruising around the site is common.
- **Edges are Touching:** The skin edges should be neatly together.

What's NOT NORMAL (Call Your Veterinarian Immediately):

- **Active Dripping or Bleeding:** Any discharge that is not clearing up.
- **Thick Discharge:** Yellow, green, or foul-smelling discharge (pus).
- **Excessive Swelling:** A large, firm, or fluid-filled swelling under or around the incision.
- **Worsening Redness:** Redness that is spreading or becoming darker.
- **Gapping or Opening:** You can see a gap between the skin edges or underlying tissue is visible.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Can I clean the incision?** No. Do not apply any creams, ointments, or disinfectants unless specifically instructed by your veterinarian. Most incisions heal best when left alone.
- **What if the incision gets a little dirty?** If your pet gets minor dirt on the incision, you can gently clean the area with a soft cloth and warm water. Do not scrub. Pat it dry gently with a clean, dry cloth.
- **When are the sutures or staples removed?** This typically happens 10-14 days after surgery. Your primary veterinarian will schedule a recheck appointment for this. Some incisions are closed with dissolving sutures under the skin and have nothing to remove.

If you have any concerns about your pet's incision, please do not hesitate to contact your primary veterinarian.