



Post-Surgery Recovery Care for Feral Cats

When you arrive to pick up post spay/neuter, we will discharge the cat to you in the trap he/she arrived in. The cat will be fully awake, but may not be fully alert. Plan to keep the cat in this trap for the recovery period. We will provide you with a record of care given, including verification of spay/neuter, rabies vaccination and any additional services provided.

After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight. 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 the cats are recovering from anesthesia they are unable to regulate their body temperature. It is important that the recovery location is temperature-controlled to keep the cats from getting too hot or too cold. A basement or bathroom will usually do the trick. If you feel you cannot provide appropriate recovery accommodations, let us know; we may be able to assist.

Hold cats until they recover. Cats usually need to be held for 24 hours after surgery, depending on recovery speed. Male cats and often females can be returned to the trapping site 12 to 24 hours following surgery, as long as they are fully awake and do not require further medical attention. In some cases, females may need 48 hours of recovery, depending on their specific circumstances. You may return nursing mothers as soon as possible, once they completely regain consciousness so they can get back to their kittens. Make sure all cats are fully conscious, clear-eyed, and alert before release.

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. Underneath the trap, place a plastic tarp, absorbent towel, or multiple layers of 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. Cover one end of the trap well with a heavy sheet or blanket. 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 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. 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.

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

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

Once the cat is eating, is alert, and has clear eyes, he can be returned to his colony habitat.

Before returning the cat, 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, please give us a call.

Return the cats. Release the cat in the same place you trapped him or her. 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, then completely remove the cover and walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. She is simply reorienting herself to her surroundings. Sometimes a cat can “disappear” for a few days after she is returned. She will appear eventually. Resume the feeding schedule and continue to provide food and water—she may eat when you are not around.

Thoroughly clean the traps with a nontoxic disinfectant when the returning is complete. Whether the traps are borrowed or your own, they should be cleaned before they are stored. Then they will be ready for the next trapping adventure. Even traps that appear clean must be disinfected—the scent of the cat previously trapped may deter other cats from entering.

Note: traps rented from the SF SPCA Community Cat Program **must be returned clean or a \$20 cleaning fee will be applied.**