



PROPER SCREENING LOWERS ANESTHESIA RISKS FOR PETS OF ANY AGE

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Anesthesia is a fairly routine procedure in veterinary medicine, but it still causes owners plenty of concern, especially when dealing with an older pet.

“The practice of veterinary medicine often requires the use of anesthesia in order to perform even the most routine procedures,” says Dr. Kurt Grimm, veterinarian and anesthesia resident at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine Teaching Hospital at Urbana. “Pets don’t understand that they need to be still while their teeth are cleaned or while an X-ray is taken. Some pets won’t even allow a veterinarian to perform a physical examination without restraint.

Even though the risk is relatively small for routine procedures performed on healthy pets, there is always the potential for an anesthetic or surgical complication. Studies prove, however, that proper examination beforehand reduces the problems associated with anesthesia.

Age is not necessarily a factor in determining whether a pet can be safely anesthetized. A healthy geriatric pet with normal test results should be at no more risk than a young, healthy pet unless there is an undetected disease that reduces the patient’s ability to cope with the stresses of anesthesia and surgery.

A complete physical exam, laboratory blood analysis and other diagnostic tests enable your veterinarian to screen for disease and evaluate the potential risk in advance, then proceed appropriately. A young, healthy pet’s blood work simply may consist of a red blood cell count and a measurement of the total protein in the blood. Older pets are more likely to have an underlying disease, and more extensive blood analysis may provide the information on the health and function of the kidneys, liver and other organ system.

Some pet owners are reluctant to pay the additional costs for these tests; however, studies have shown that about one in 10 times, preanesthetic laboratory tests indicated a reason to alter the standard anesthetic approach. In a third of these, the procedure was postponed until the problem was corrected.

Pet owners, together with their veterinarian, should weight the risk of anesthesia vs. the benefit of doing the procedure. If you and your vet decide a procedure requiring anesthesia is in the best interest of your pet, your veterinarian will give you specific instructions on caring for your pet both before and after the procedure. Many times the owners must withhold food, but usually not water, for 12 hours beforehand. The after effects of anesthesia and surgery may make your pet less active for a few days, so keep it in a safe environment during this time. Feed small meals to prevent nausea and vomiting for the next 12 to 24 hours.