

How to treat constipation after surgery

Phil Zeltzman, DVM, DACVS, CVJ, FFcert.

Constipation is a common situation in pets who just had surgery.



What is constipation?

It is the inability to pass a normal stool comfortably and regularly.

You may notice:

- . No defecation for a few days
- . Hard stool
- . Straining to defecate
- . Painful or difficult defecation
- . Bloody stool

Why does constipation happen after surgery?

Constipation can happen for a number of reasons after surgery:

- . Your pet was fasted before surgery (no food = no poop)
- . Your pet may not have eaten much after surgery
- . Your pet may be dehydrated
- . Anesthesia slows transit down

- . Some injectable pain medications slow transit down
- . Some oral pain medications slow transit down
- . Some pets may have a condition that makes defecation difficult (back leg surgery) or uncomfortable (surgery near the anus)
- . Confinement, ie lack of exercise, can slow transit down.

How can I treat my pet's constipation?

Depending on what your pet likes, here are some suggestions:

- . Encourage drinking
- . Add water to the food, and mix them together
- . Switch to canned food, ideally the same brand and type as the dry food
- . Feed several, smaller meals throughout the day
- . Give canned pumpkin: from 1 tablespoon for a cat or small dog, to 4 tablespoons for a big dog
- . Give Metamucil (original formula, unflavored, without xylitol): from 1/2 teaspoon for a cat or small dog, to 2 teaspoons for a big dog.

If these simple ideas don't help, please call your family vet who might recommend a laxative. "Human" laxatives can be very toxic to pets, so please only follow your vet's recommendation.

The bottom line

Constipation is common and uncomfortable after surgery. Thankfully, it resolves quickly once your pet eats more regularly and resumes normal habits.