

Why Do Cats Have To Fast Before Surgery?

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Sometimes an image gives me an idea and this one illustrates why you need to fast a cat before general anesthesia. While possibly confronting to some, I wanted to show the consequences of eating in the hours leading up to scheduled surgery.



Cat vomiting after anesthesia and surgery because she ate before

General anesthesia is the administration of drugs or gas to render the cat unconscious. During anesthesia, the muscles relax, and the cat is unable to feel pain.

Cats who are due to have elective surgery will fast, usually from the night before. The cat can have his or her dinner the night before, but no breakfast on the day of surgery. Water is usually left out two hours before the surgery is scheduled.

What is elective surgery?

Elective surgery is a term used for non-emergency surgery which is medically necessary, but can be delayed and includes:

- Spaying and neutering
- Dental work

- Removal of benign tumours

Why can't cats eat before surgery?

- When a cat is put under general anesthesia, the gastrointestinal muscles and lower esophageal sphincter relax. This increases the risk passive regurgitation of the stomach contents, which can enter the lungs due to the absence of upper airway reflexes (swallowing, coughing or gagging), which are mechanisms to protect the airways.
- Postoperative nausea and vomiting (PONV) is common side effect of general anesthesia post-surgery. If the cat vomits during the post-operative recovery, it can aspirate into the lungs due to grogginess.

Aspiration of food, stomach acid and fluids into the lungs can lead to inflammation or aspiration pneumonia, a life-threatening condition lung infection.

Note:

Not all cats are able to fast overnight, diabetics, senior cats, and young kittens are at increased risk of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). Check with your veterinarian for pre-surgery fasting based on your cat's age and possible risk factors.

What should you do if the cat has eaten?

Contact your veterinarian and let them know. They may choose to delay surgery to be on the safe side.

If you live in a multi-pet home and there is any risk of the cat getting into other pet's food, put food out after the cat has been taken to the veterinarian. My Labrador was scheduled for surgery there was a possibility she had got to the cat's food the morning of surgery, so we called the veterinarian, and although we couldn't be 100% sure she had eaten, he decided to delay her surgery.

What if the cat needs emergency surgery?

It is not always possible to schedule surgery as emergencies can and do happen. The veterinarian may decide to delay surgery for several hours until the GI tract is empty. Sometimes the benefit of immediate surgery outweighs the risk of aspiration.