

## Post-Surgery Instructions for Feral Cats

1. **After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight in the same trap.** 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.
2. **Monitor the cats.** Check the cats often for their progress; keep an eye out for bleeding, infection, illness, and appetite. If a cat is vomiting, bleeding, having difficulty breathing, or not waking up, get veterinary assistance immediately. Ask the clinic before the surgery how to reach them if there are surgical complications. If a cat is vomiting while still unconscious, her head should be turned to avoid choking. Sometimes you can do this by tipping the trap to change the cat's position.
3. **Put your safety first.** Keep the traps covered to reduce 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.
4. **Feed and provide the cats with water after they regain consciousness.** Wait eight hours after surgery before feeding adult cats food. Kittens can be fed shortly after waking from anesthesia. When feeding the cats, lift the back door of the trap very slowly, and allow only a small gap – one-half to one inch at most - to open. Slide a plastic lid with a little bit of food on it through the gap without putting your hand inside the trap. You may want to purchase or borrow a device called an “isolator” or “trap divider” for this purpose. Always relock the trap door. (If you don't have an isolator device to keep the cat in the back of the trap, and you feel you cannot even slide a plastic lid in without the cat trying to escape, then don't feed them.)
5. **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. If a cat needs further care (longer than 48 hours), you will need to transfer her to a holding pen. You may also need to transfer cats to a clean trap in case the towel is soiled during recovery.

6. **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 off the cover, pull that door up and off, and then walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. She is simply reorienting herself to her surroundings. It is not uncommon for a cat to “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.
7. **Thoroughly clean the traps with a bleach solution when the returning is complete.** Whether the traps are borrowed or your own, the traps should be cleaned before they are stored. Then they will be ready for the next trapping adventure. Even traps that appear clean must be sterilized to prevent transmittal of contagious and deadly feline viruses.
8. **Trap the remaining members of the colony if necessary,** after a short break of a week or two, and complete the colony’s Trap-Neuter-Return effort. Be prepared for the fact that you may re-trap cats that are already ear-tipped. If you do, it is sometimes best to hold that cat in the trap until the cats you are aiming for have been trapped. It is essential to fix every cat in the colony, even the males.
9. **Relocation of the cats should only be done as a last resort.** Alley Cat Allies does not recommend relocation; it should be done only under extreme circumstances when the cats’ lives are in danger. In that case, be fully prepared by reading our **Guidelines for Safe Relocation of Feral Cats**.

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