

WHAT IS A LACERATION REPAIR?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A laceration is a wound produced by the tearing of body tissue. Unlike an incision with smooth edges, a laceration is often jagged and irregular. As a result, there can be variable degrees of damage to the underlying body tissue and structures depending on the depth and force of the trauma that caused the laceration.

WHAT ARE THE INDICATIONS FOR PERFORMING A LACERATION REPAIR?

Surgical repair of a laceration is indicated whenever the laceration occurred recently and is large enough to warrant sutures. Very small lacerations or punctures typically do not require surgical repair. Most often, laceration under 1 cm or 1/2 inch in length do not need sutures.

WHAT PREOPERATIVE EXAMINATIONS OR TESTS ARE NEEDED BEFORE A LACERATION REPAIR?

Preoperative tests depend in part on the age and general health of the animal as well as the cause of the laceration. If a sharp object or bite from another animal is the cause, simple blood tests, such as a packed cell volume or blood count, may be done prior to anesthesia. If the laceration is associated with major trauma, extensive tests such as radiographs, blood count, serum biochemical tests, a urinalysis and possibly an EKG may be necessary. Repair of the laceration may even be delayed until the animal is stabilized and more severe injuries are treated.

WHAT TYPE OF ANESTHESIA IS NEEDED FOR A LACERATION REPAIR?

In small lacerations, anesthesia may not be needed at all. Sometimes, local anesthetic is used. Large lacerations or uncooperative patients may require general anesthesia to induce complete unconsciousness and relaxation. In this case, the pet will receive a pre-anesthetic sedative-analgesic drug to help him relax, a brief intravenous anesthetic to allow placement of a breathing tube in the windpipe, and subsequently inhalation (gas) anesthesia in oxygen during the actual surgery.

How Is the Laceration Operation Done?

Initially, the hair surrounding the laceration is clipped. The area is scrubbed with surgical soap and disinfectants to remove any debris. Dead or severely damaged skin is trimmed off. Depending on the depth of the laceration, multiple layers of sutures (stitches) may be needed to close the laceration. Absorbable sutures are used to bring the edges of the underlying tissues together. The outer layer of skin is closed with sutures or surgical staples; these need to be removed in about 10 to 14 days.

HOW LONG DOES THE LACERATION REPAIR TAKE TO PERFORM?

The procedure takes about 15 minutes to an hour to perform in most cases, including the needed time for preparation and anesthesia. In small, uncomplicated lacerations, the procedure is relatively quick; whereas in large lacerations, especially those involving severe bite wounds or trauma, can take longer and may require two surgeons.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS OF A LACERATION OPERATION?

The overall risk of this surgery in a healthy young pet is very low, especially in those situations where no anesthesia or local anesthesia is used. The major risks accompany large lacerations and lacerations associated with significant trauma and are those of general anesthesia, bleeding (hemorrhage), postoperative infection and wound breakdown (dehiscence) over the incision. Overall complication rate is low, but serious complications can result in death or the need for additional surgery.

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL POSTOPERATIVE AFTERCARE FOR A LACERATION REPAIR?

Postoperative medication should be given to relieve pain, which is judged in most cases to be mild to moderate and can be effectively eliminated with safe and effective pain medicines. Since lacerations are typically contaminated with debris and bacteria, antibiotics are usually prescribed. The home care requires reduced activity until the stitches are removed in 10 to 14 days. The suture line should be inspected daily by the pet owner for signs of redness, discharge, swelling or pain.

HOW LONG IS THE HOSPITAL STAY FOLLOWING A LACERATION REPAIR?

The typical stay for small and minor lacerations is brief. The pet is usually sent home as soon as the laceration is repaired. For extensive lacerations and those associated with severe trauma, hospital stays vary depending on the overall health of the pet.