



## Laser Surgery an Option to Treat Pets

By: PetPlace Staff

### Laser Surgery and Your Pet

The high-tech medical miracle of laser surgery, long available to humans, is increasingly being used as a tool to treat pets more effectively and less painfully than ever.

Veterinarians in growing numbers are performing surgeries on all types of animals – from dogs and cats to birds and horses – with a focused beam of light that cuts with exquisite precision and speeds the healing process.

That beam is replacing the scalpel in a long list of procedures, including declawing cats, removing cancerous tumors and spaying and neutering pets. Proponents say its use is a significant development in veterinary medicine because it reduces the bleeding and bruising normally associated with surgery, limits post-operative pain and swelling, and allows for speedier recovery.

"Laser surgery has given us the opportunity to perform surgeries for problems that we couldn't treat before and can dramatically decrease the pain associated with surgery," said Dr. Jon Rappaport, the veterinarian who is founder and chief executive officer of PetPlace.com. "While it hasn't revolutionized veterinary medicine, it has made a large number of procedures more amenable to surgery and with a faster recovery."

Lasers have been used in human surgeries for two decades, but it is only in the past five or so years that veterinary medicine began to use them. They have become standard equipment in about 1,000 of the country's 20,000 veterinary clinics. The growth in their use is being fueled by the fact that the machines have become more compact and affordable for veterinarians. Still, the equipment costs a veterinarian \$20,000 to \$45,000, an expense that generally makes laser surgery more expensive for pet owners than traditional procedures.

### What a Laser Does

A laser focuses an intense beam of light at a particular wavelength frequency. The most common type is called a carbon dioxide laser. It works by vaporizing water in cells, causing the cells themselves to be vaporized but leaving surrounding tissue virtually unaffected. According to veterinarians, the process, called ablation, produces:

- **Less pain.** As the laser moves through tissue, it automatically seals nerve endings. As a result, animals experience less post-operative pain.
- **Less bleeding.** The laser also seals small blood vessels as it cuts and can be used to assist blood coagulation. Veterinarians get a better view of the surgery and can often do procedures more quickly. That, in turn, can lessen the time that an animal has to be anesthetized.
- **Less swelling.** There is no bruising or tearing of tissue because the cut is made only by a beam of light and not by a steel blade. Additionally, the laser seals lymphatic vessels, reducing seepage around

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the wound.

- **Reduced scarring and infection.** The precision of the laser's cut results in less scar tissue and the heat of the laser kills bacteria.
- **Faster recovery.** Because there is less bleeding, swelling and pain, animals can often return to normal activity and their home environment more quickly.

### **What a Laser is Used For**

Veterinarians are using laser surgery for many procedures that have traditionally been performed using a scalpel, although it is not suitable for all surgeries. They are particularly effective in tight spots or areas, such as the mouth, that have a highly concentrated blood supply. They can be used to excise tumors or simply vaporize them if they are small enough – for example, if one grows on a pet's eyelid.

The technique has offered new and successful methods of treatment for some persistently stubborn diseases. Stomatitis, for example, is a disease in which a cat or dog's gums become inflamed, potentially developing masses of painful inflammation. It often defied cure, but the laser has proven effective against it.

The benefits of laser surgery are probably most dramatic in the declawing of cats. The traditional procedure involves cutting a cat's claw out with a blade and then applying pressure bandages to stop the bleeding. The cat's paws remain bandaged for 24 to 48 hours, the cat has a hospital stay of one to two nights and then days of recovery.

Under laser surgery, the claw is excised by the light beam, but there is no need for pressure bandages because the laser seals the blood vessels as it makes its cut. Instead, the wound is closed with a dab of sealant. Cats are often up and walking around the same day with far less post-operative discomfort.

Adele Karp of Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., had her cat Peaches declawed two years ago using laser surgery. Peaches had begun to pull up her carpeting, thinking, she said, that "the carpet was his scratching post." But even then Karp rejected the idea of having Peaches undergo a traditional declawing procedure.

"I always thought it was too painful and too stressful until I had seen other cats go through laser surgery," Karp said. "Now I don't think that anyone should do anything but laser surgery. It is a lot less painful. There is really no blood at all and no bandages. I was very pleased."

### **Legal Disclaimer**

If your pet is showing any signs of distress or you suspect your pet is seriously ill, CONTACT YOUR VETERINARIAN immediately.

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