

## Post-operative care for patients after airway surgery

This information sheet deals with the surgeries commonly performed on brachycephalic dogs, the “flat-faced” breeds like Bull Dogs, French Bulldogs, Pugs etc. These patients often present with respiratory difficulties, and it is often inspiration (breathing in) that causes more problems than expiration (breathing out). These dogs may have a history of collapse when they are hot, excited or exercised. They usually have obvious loud breathing sounds. The goal of the surgery is to improve the patient’s tolerance of exercise and excitement, though the noises are often improved too. Some patients / breeds presenting for airway surgery have fundamental flaws in their airway anatomy, and unfortunately airway surgery to correct this is not without risks.

Airway problems that are addressed surgically usually involve one or more of:

- **The nostrils;** these may need widening.
- **The soft palate;** this may be too long, and may need shortening
- **The larynx;** soft tissue pockets in the larynx can evert, partially occluding the airway. These may need to be removed. In more extreme cases, we may need to bypass the larynx altogether with a “tracheostomy” but this is beyond the scope of this information sheet.
- **The trachea;** this may be too narrow over some, or all, of its length. We consider any surgery to address this problem to be a specialist procedure and having identified this problem (with scoping etc) we would then refer these cases onwards for specialist attention.

**Medication:**

**Antibiotics:** Antibiotics like claviseptin are sometimes given for a few days (usually tablets, twice daily).

**Anti-inflammatories:** Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs usually start/resume the morning after surgery. These are tablets (eg carprofen, Onsior or Previcox), or liquid (meloxicam). They should be given with food. If vomiting / diarrhoea is noted, stop this medication and seek prompt advice.

**Analgesics:** We sometimes dispense tramadol, (tablets given twice daily) for 5-7 days.

### Reducing stress post-operatively is important:

**Excitement and barking should be avoided** wherever possible from immediately post-operatively and for the next month or so. It is best to remove toys and control interactions with other animals for the first few weeks post-operatively.

**Restricted activity should be enforced for two weeks** to avoid over exertion and heavy breathing while healing occurs. Walking exercise on a lead a few times a day is allowed. A harness is usually preferred to a collar for the first few weeks post-operatively

**Vet visits and hospitalisation:** these can stress patients, so we try to get these patients discharged promptly post-operatively.

**Rechecks** a few days after discharge may be with your own vet to save un-necessary travelling. We can do this check-up where travelling is not an issue. All our post-op check-ups are free under our “fixed price” schemes. We would ideally like to see all cases back 2-3 weeks post-operatively when we can consider removing any sutures/staples and check that all is going to plan. Sending a photo and ideally a video with a sound track of the patient at home is often a very acceptable alternative to travelling for a check up, especially if all is otherwise going well.

**Hot weather which can cause stress and panting should be avoided.** Any exercise / toilet breaks in the garden are often best kept to the cool of the early morning/ late evening, at least for the first few weeks post-operatively.

**Wounds;** with the exception of the nostrils, any sutures may not be visible. Any sutures can be allowed to fall out on their own. It is impossible to stop dogs licking their noses, so collars are not required!!

**Food and water:** It is a good idea to be present during feeding for at least the first week or two after surgery to keep the pace of ingestion slow and steady, rather than allowing gorging. Consider limiting the amount available at one time. Food with the consistency of meatballs that stays in a lump when squeezed without exuding liquid is easiest for these patients to swallow. Dry food is an alternative but liquid food should be avoided (eg gravy). Avoid feeding your pet with other animals around, as feeding competition is likely to encourage overly rapid intake of food. Water may initially need to be given in small volumes, offered frequently to prevent excess coughing in some dogs. The aim is not to limit the water intake. It is to limit the speed at which water is consumed.

### Complications

Some retching/gagging/coughing may be seen for a few days after surgery.

Regrettably, there is a risk of perioperative mortality (death) with airway surgery. Sadly some risk is unavoidable and this goes with the territory. The airway is obviously critically important for life and any swelling or haemorrhage around the airway can be life threatening.

**Our fixed prices include any follow up consults with us, but don’t include further medication or revision surgery.**

**For further details please see [www.wm-referrals.com](http://www.wm-referrals.com), “about us”, “FAQs”.**

**For further advice please contact us by phone on 07944 105501 or at [enquiries@wm-referrals.com](mailto:enquiries@wm-referrals.com). Consider texting/emailing pictures.**