

Enucleation

What is an enucleation?

Enucleation is a surgical procedure to remove the eye and the eyelids. The empty eye socket is usually filled with a silicone ball that serves as a space-filler to prevent a sunken appearance after surgery. The skin is permanently closed over the eye socket.

What are some reasons your pet may need an enucleation?

There are many reasons a pet may need an enucleation; usually, they involve a blind, painful eye. Common reasons for an eye removal include pain from a severe infection, intra- or extra-ocular tumors, medically unresponsive glaucoma, and irreparable ocular injury.

What happens if you choose to have an enucleation for your pet?

Before Surgery:

When you decide enucleation is the best option for your pet, we will schedule a date for surgery, usually within one week of the exam day. Your pet will need complete blood work and a urinalysis prior to the day of surgery. These tests are important in reaching an accurate pre-operative evaluation, assuring our goal of a safe anesthesia, and leading to the best possible recovery for your pet.

We will also discuss different methods of pain control for your pet. One option is a fentanyl patch. It is best to have the patch applied to the skin the afternoon prior to surgery. A small area of fur is shaved and a clear plastic transdermal patch is applied. After an initial uptake time of 8-12 hours, this patch will release continual pain medication to your pet for 72 hours.

The Day of Surgery:

This surgery often is performed on an outpatient basis, which means your pet will go home the same day. You will be asked not to feed your pet breakfast. Please bring all of his medications with you. Phone us with any questions, and refer to our anesthesia handout for your pet's specific pre-operative instructions.

When your pet is admitted for surgery, he will be given a sedative to help him relax. Later, an IV catheter will be placed for medication and fluid administration. General anesthesia will keep your pet asleep and pain-free during surgery. Our certified technicians will be monitoring your pet every step of the way.

The Operation:

While under anesthesia, a regional nerve block (similar to what a dentist gives) will be placed to keep your pet comfortable after surgery. The eye is then gently removed through skin incisions placed above and below the eyelids. The ocular muscles and optic nerve are cut, allowing the eye and surrounding tissues to be removed. A silicone ball usually is placed in the eye socket as a space-filler, and the incision is closed with three layers of sutures.

Recovery:

After surgery, an Elizabethan collar will be placed on your pet to prevent him from rubbing at the sutures. Your pet will recover under the watchful eye of our team. Once your pet feels awake enough to walk, he is transferred to a hospital kennel. There, they quietly rest on a fleece bed and are closely supervised until they are ready to go home.

After Surgery:

When your pet is awake and comfortable, he can go home. This is usually 3-5 hours after surgery. We will provide you with written instructions regarding medications and restrictions after surgery. Please schedule a courtesy appointment for your pet 12-14 days after surgery for skin suture removal.

Successful enucleations require care and attention by both owner and ophthalmologist. Complications after an enucleation are incredibly infrequent, but do include: excessive incisional bleeding after surgery that resolves after bandage and overnight hospitalization, premature suture removal by the pet, and transient nose bleed. More serious complications include: infection within the eye socket, and in less than 1 in 100 patients, rejection of the silicone implant. Both of these complications resolve after removal of the implant. We want to stress that these complications are very rare and almost all patients recover from surgery without any problems.

For some pets, there are other options besides enucleation surgery. These options include: Intraocular Prosthesis Implant or Intravitreal Gentamicin Injection. Please ask our staff if your pet qualifies for one of these options. Please keep in mind, however, that no other surgery has the success rate and ability to relieve pain and discomfort with as few long-term, potential complications as an enucleation.

We can show you post-operative photos of both dogs and cats who have had enucleation surgery and, remember, your pet will still be the beautiful friend you have always loved.