Laser Declaw Surgery for Cats

What is a Laser and how does it work?

LASER is an acronym for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission Radiation. In short, it is a device that generates a beam of light energy at a specific wavelength. The first laser was developed in 1960, and its use in human surgery became widespread in the late 1980’s. The most commonly used veterinary surgical laser is the CO₂ laser. The wavelength of the CO₂ laser beam is absorbed by the water found in skin and other soft tissue, vaporizing the cells and thereby "cutting" the tissues. The surgeon can control the extent to which the laser beam is absorbed into the surrounding tissue, allowing extreme surgical precision.

What are the benefits of laser surgery for my pet?

There are three major advantages of laser surgery when compared to traditional stainless steel surgical scalpels, which are decreased pain, reduced bleeding and blood loss and reduced risk of infection.

Decreased Post-Operative Pain is accomplished when the laser seals the nerve endings as it cuts. This reduces pain impulses from the surgery site in the immediate post-operative period. In addition, the decreased pain involved with laser surgery may allow the surgeon to remove small skin tumors using local anesthesia rather than having the pet undergo general anesthesia.

Reduced Bleeding and Blood Loss is achieved through cauterization of blood vessels as the laser beam vaporizes the tissues.

Reduced Risk of Surgical Infection occurs due to the superheating of the tissues in the incision site, destroying any bacteria that are present at the time of surgery.

What surgeries can be performed with the laser?

Almost any soft-tissue surgery may be performed with the CO₂ laser. Routine procedures such as ovariohysterectomy (spay), castration (neutering), and declawing are commonly done with the laser. The CO₂ laser can also be used for skin tumor removal, eyelid surgery and some mouth and throat procedures. Your veterinarian will discuss whether CO₂ laser is appropriate for use during your pet’s surgery.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM
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