

Splenectomy





Splenectomy

What is a splenectomy?

Splenectomy is the term used for surgical removal of the spleen.

What is the spleen?

The spleen is one of the organs inside the abdomen (tummy).

It is involved with regulating the immune system and the red blood cells in the body. It also acts as a store for red blood cells (the oxygen carrying cells of the body).

What problems can dogs and cats get with their spleen?

There are several reasons that a spleen may need to be removed:

- Cancer/malignant masses, e.g. haemangiosarcoma, lymphoma
- Benign masses, e.g. haematoma
- Trauma
- Torsion (twisting)

The most common reason in dogs and cats for splenectomy is to stop bleeding that is happening from a mass (growth) within the spleen.

Is splenic disease an emergency?

In many cases, yes. If the spleen has started to bleed, for example due to a mass or secondary to trauma, then this bleeding can be life-threatening and the only way to stop it is to remove the spleen.

If a spleen has twisted around and the blood supply has become compromised then this may also be an emergency.

What investigations are likely to be needed?

If there is a mass in the spleen then it is important to image the abdomen and the chest to look for any evidence of tumours elsewhere. Some common splenic tumours, for example haemangiosarcoma, tend to spread elsewhere early in the course of the disease and surgery would not be advised if this was the case. Blood tests are also important, especially if the spleen has been bleeding, as a blood transfusion may be required.

Imaging is likely to involve CT scanning +/- ultrasound examination. We are fortunate at Wear Referrals to have on-site ultrasound, CT and MRI scanners to avoid any delay between diagnosis and treatment.

One of the big challenges with splenic disease is that we will often not have a definite diagnosis prior to deciding whether to operate. Benign and malignant masses can appear very similar on imaging and can both cause bleeding. Often the only way to obtain a diagnosis is by analysing the spleen after it has been removed.

How is a splenectomy performed?

The spleen is usually removed via a laparotomy (surgical opening into the abdomen). This surgery is performed by our Soft Tissue surgeons.

We would normally use advanced vessel sealing devices to rapidly and reliably seal off the many blood vessels that go into the spleen prior to removing it. Our equipment for this is the same as that used in human surgery.

When the spleen has been removed it will be submitted to a Specialist pathologist to find out more about the underlying problem.

Doesn't my animal need his/her spleen?

We are fortunate in veterinary surgery that dogs and cats cope much better with removal of their spleen compared to people and major complications due to the lack of a spleen are very rare.

How successful is surgery?

This entirely depends on the underlying splenic disease.

For trauma and benign masses, splenectomy is expected to cure the problem,

For cancerous/malignant masses, the outlook is more varied. With the most common malignant splenic tumour, haemangiosarcoma, this is sadly a very aggressive tumour and most patients will only survive for a few months even after removal of the spleen.

Are there any risks with surgery?

Generally speaking, splenectomy is a rapid and relatively low-risk surgery. If there has been significant bleeding from the spleen then this complicates things and patients may require intensive care and management in order to be stable enough for anaesthesia and surgery.

How long will my pet stay in hospital after surgery?

This depends on how sick the patient is, but most patients will be home within a few days after surgery.

How much does surgery cost?

The cost of anaesthesia and surgery is usually in the region of £2,000-2,500. This is in addition to the cost of diagnostic investigations, blood transfusions and inpatient care.

I have further questions, what should I do?

If you have already had an appointment with a soft tissue surgeon at Wear Referrals, please contact us on 01388 777770 or email the surgeon using the email address provided on their business card.

If we have not seen your pet yet, please feel free to ask any questions you may have during the initial consultation.

If your pet has had surgery and you have urgent questions or concerns, we are contactable 24/7 on 01388 777770.

