

# LAPAROSCOPY

## THE GENTLER SURGERY

By Nancy Moyle, Ph.D.  
Co-Director  
Lone Tree Veterinary  
Medical Center  
www.lonetreevet.com



Photo by Zina Seletskaya

Laparoscopy is a surgical technique that combines high technology, precision and surgical skill. Also called “minimally invasive surgery,” veterinary laparoscopy utilizes the same technology found in human medicine and offers the same benefits to our pets.

Although this technology has been around since the early 1900’s, only within the past decade has it gained wider acceptance in veterinary medicine. With the perfection of new devices designed specifically for veterinarians, laparoscopy offers pet owners another option when considering a surgical procedure for their pet.

### How Is Laparoscopic Surgery Performed?

Laparoscopy is performed by using several highly specialized devices including fiber optic cables and lights, miniature video cameras with microscopes, high definition monitors, and special surgical instruments handled via tubes inserted into the body through a very small incision.

Images of the body’s interior are transmitted from the laparoscope to an external video monitor, allowing the surgeon to see the internal

organs and tissues, make or confirm a diagnosis, and perform a surgical procedure with very high precision, without disturbing the surrounding structures.

Because the incision is so small -- usually the size of a dime -- only one or two sutures may be all that is required to close it, once the procedure is completed. Contrast this with a traditional surgery, where incisions are usually much larger, and in some cases much much larger, in order for the surgeon to locate the area of interest, be able to get a good look inside and insert the surgical instruments needed to perform the procedure.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of laparoscopy is the precision it allows the surgeon. The ability to get a really good look at things and determine an exact internal location with minimal intrusion offers a wonderful alternative to traditional techniques in many cases.

### What Are The Benefits?

When compared to traditional surgery, laparoscopy offers several benefits, including:

- ◆ Much smaller incision, resulting in less trauma to the body and less scarring.
- ◆ Surgery time may be shorter.
- ◆ Reduced risk of being exposed to infection.
- ◆ A more precise surgery, as it’s easier for the surgeon to see what he/she is doing.
- ◆ Reduced pain by up to 65%, which also reduces the amount of pain medication needed.
- ◆ Less overall discomfort.
- ◆ Faster healing and recovery time.
- ◆ Able to resume normal activities in shorter amount of time.

### Typical Procedures

Most routine veterinary procedures can be performed laparoscopically and include the following:

- ◆ Spay
- ◆ Neuter of a retained testicle
- ◆ Gastropexy (stomach tacking)
- ◆ Cystotomy (bladder stone removal)

- ◆ Biopsy
- ◆ Growth and mass removal
- ◆ Foreign body removal
- ◆ Otoscopy (ears)
- ◆ Rhinoscopy (nose)
- ◆ Arthroscopy (joint)
- ◆ Exploratory surgery

### What About Cost?

While costs may vary, a laparoscopic surgery can run from \$200.00 to \$500.00 more than its traditional counterpart. It is important to note, however, that laparoscopic devices are highly sophisticated and very expensive, and the veterinarian must have advanced training and experience in their use and applications. Consequently, the cost of providing this type of procedure is considerably higher.

For many pet owners who have experienced the benefits of laparoscopy themselves, the additional cost is worth it.

### Is There a Downside?

There are always things to consider when looking at any surgical procedure and laparoscopy is no different. The most common downside is that the procedure may end up taking as much or more time than if it had been performed using traditional techniques. While this could be due to a variety of discoveries once the surgeon is viewing the internal anatomy, it could also be due to the speed and efficiency of the surgeon.



Another possible consideration is the that the surgeon might have to switch to traditional techniques once the laparoscopy is in progress due to unforeseen circumstances that make traditional surgery better or safer for the pet. An example of this would be finding an inordinate amount of fatty tissue or scar tissue inside the body cavity that would prevent the surgeon from safely navigating the laparoscopic devices or getting a clear view, limiting both the precision and accuracy of the surgery.

Finally, there are some procedures that can only be best performed by traditional means.

### Other Things To Consider

Laparoscopy is still surgery and requires the normal pre-surgical screening, including an exam and blood work, as well as general anesthesia and pain medications. While most pets are good candidates, some may not be. Animals under ten pounds may not be large enough

to accommodate the laparoscopic devices and allow the instruments to be easily and safely handled inside the body. However, as technology continues to progress and the devices become even smaller, the ability to perform these procedures on the tiniest of pets could become more commonplace.

If you are considering surgery for your pet and laparoscopy is available, discuss the options and benefits with your veterinarian. Making the right choice will be a lot easier once the needs of your pet and the answers to your questions have been addressed to your satisfaction.

*For more information about laparoscopy, please ask your family veterinarian or call Lone Tree Veterinary Medical Center at 303-708-8050. They will be happy to schedule a consultation with one of their surgeons.*