

The Nobody's Cats FOUNDATION

Staging your free-roaming cats prior to and after surgery is a lot easier than you might think! Since the cats remain in their humane traps throughout the process, there is no need for handling or other measures that would create stress, anxiety or the opportunity for escape. All you need to do is create a quiet, comfortable, and safe area, provide fresh food and water, keep things clean, and monitor their status. Here are some tips from our mentors to help.

TNR Staging Tips

Advice from our mentors and other experts about setting up and managing a staging area for your cats before and after their surgery.

Set Up the Space

Before initiating trapping, set up your area. This can be in a garage, basement, laundry room, shop, tack room, or other space. You can create the staging area on a table or on the floor. Depending on the number of animals you plan to manage, you can stage animals on a table and underneath the table for maximum use of space.



Line the area or table with plastic such as an old shower curtain, garbage bags, tarp, or plastic sheeting. (If your staging area is completely or partially on the floor, especially in the colder weather, be sure to insulate the floor first with cardboard, folded blankets, or foam.)

Position two bricks, 2X4 lumber, or cut landscape timbers so that the traps will rest above the floor or table surface. (Covering the “risers” with plastic will help to keep them clean.) Next, place a layer of absorbent material on top of the plastic such as newspaper or wee wee pads.



You can also place the traps directly onto the absorbent material (as seen at right), but you will need to check frequently to be sure the cat isn't sitting on wet or soiled material. (One mentor recommends placing newspaper inside the front of the trap and feeding with paper plates on the newspaper. Many cats will use the plate and newspaper as litter after eating or may urinate or defecate on a plate or in a bowl.)

Some people skip these steps and just place the traps directly on top of sturdy litter boxes or aluminum steam pans with litter or shredded newspaper. Another tip to help keep your area clean when the staging area is on a table against a wall: place a layer of cardboard against the wall to protect the surface.

Any approach is fine as long as you ensure the cats remain clean and dry and it's straightforward for you to provide care.



Organize all the materials you will need for staging in advance, such as cleaning supplies, food and water, dishes and plates, fresh newspaper and wee wee pads, garbage bags, etc. Put together a little kit with necessities such as scissors, a can opener, flash light, note pad and pen, duct tape, cable ties, and other items that will come in handy.

Our mentors recommend that you align all the traps so that the sliding back doors face in the same direction. This way you can create an assembly-line approach to cleaning the traps and removing and replacing food and water. (The foundation provides trap dividers with all of its trap loans. These are wonderful tools that allow you to isolate the cat in the trap while the door is open.)

Temperature control will be an issue after surgery while the cats recover from anesthesia, so be sure that you will be able to keep the temperature from 70-78 degrees F for at least 12-18 hours after you bring the cats back from their surgery appointment. In the summer, you may need to provide air conditioning for some of this time during the hottest weather or, at a minimum, use fans to circulate the air. In the winter, you should provide heating for the first 12-18 hours. (In areas without heating, this is easily accomplished with a small space heater. Align the traps so that the ends face the heater and cover the remaining sides with a blanket.) After the cats have recovered from the anesthesia, you can gradually adjust the temperature.



Keep the traps covered throughout the staging process. You can do this with linens, newspaper or cardboard. This helps the cats remain calm.

Pieces of cardboard or folded newspaper can be placed between cats who are unfamiliar with each other to prevent disagreements, while covers can be placed over multiple traps containing familiar cats to provide comfort.

Always keep children, dogs and other pets away from the staging area, and avoid any unnecessary activity in the area. The quieter and calmer the environment – and the caretaker – the quieter and calmer the cats!

Before Surgery

Move trapped cats to their staging area as quickly as possible to minimize stress. If you are trapping in the same area as your staging area, simply toss a sheet or towel over the trap and quietly carry the trap to the staging area. Keep the trap covered. If you are transporting animals from a trapping project to a staging area, quickly and quietly place the covered traps in your vehicle. (Be sure to line your vehicle with layers of plastic and absorbent materials to catch urine, dirt, and other messes. One mentor recommends placing traps on lids for under-bed or other large storage containers to catch any urine.)

Up to midnight of the evening before your surgery appointment, provide fresh water and food in the trap. Use wide-bottomed, shallow bowls for water and small containers for food. For food, our mentors recommend using small paper plates, microwaveable meal bowls, plastic butter/margarine containers, or small plastic deli containers or bowls. One mentor suggests mixing dry or wet food with water to prevent spills and multiple bowls. Another recommends securing bowls to the trap when a cat routinely tips over bowls. Just poke two holes near the top rim and secure the bowl to the side of the trap with zip or twist ties. Then, the night before surgery cut the ties and remove the bowl from the trap so that it doesn't interfere with the surgery clinic process.



To feed and clean, slowly fold the sheet or other covering over the back half of the trap, and insert the trap divider so that the tines are secure through the bottom of the trap. Then open the sliding back door, clean the area, replace the food and water, and close the sliding back door. Move on to the next trap in the same way.



BE SURE THAT THE DOUBLE LOCKING MECHANISM IS SECURELY CLOSED BEFORE REMOVING THE TRAP DIVIDER.

After Surgery

Return the traps to the staging area after surgery as quickly as possible. Ensure that the temperature is at a safe level for 12 to 18 hours and check on the cats every hour or so for the first few hours to ensure the cats recover steadily. You should see increasing signs of alertness as the anesthesia wears off. Every cat recovers at a different rate and in a different way so expect each cat to recover in his or her own time and way.

To check on a cat's condition, simply lift up the end of the covering and observe quietly. Do not shake the trap, poke the cat through the trap, or otherwise create stress. Speak quietly and softly. Keep an eye on the absorbent materials or litter for signs of urine and feces, as this indicates the cats' urinary and digestive systems are recovering. Replace soiled newspaper or wee wee pads as quickly as possible during this period, especially if the traps are resting on them, so that the cats do not become wet and chilled.

The veterinary staff will have provided post-operative instructions about when to begin feeding, but generally you can begin providing food in about 6-8 hours, though many cats will not eat until late that evening or early the next morning. (Kittens and younger adults will recover more quickly and you can provide food sooner for these animals.)

When feeding for the first time after surgery, provide food in very small amounts every few hours to allow the cats' digestive systems to begin functionally slowly. Either wet or dry food will do depending on the cats' preferences, but our mentors also recommend that you mix a little water with wet food for the first few feedings to help hydrate the cat. After a few small feedings, you can provide a normal volume of food for ongoing feeding. You can provide water as soon as the cats return from surgery, but avoid deep bowls of water if they are still groggy. Our mentors recommend a shallow bowl with ice chips that will melt slowly to start.