

# Tail Amputation (Caudectomy) In Cats

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 [www.cat-world.com.au/tail-amputation-in-cats.html](http://www.cat-world.com.au/tail-amputation-in-cats.html)

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June 9, 2017

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## About:

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Your cat's tail is an extension of his spine but is naturally more flexible. It is used to help your cat balance as well as a way for your cat to communicate to others.

Medically known as **caudectomy**, tail amputation refers to the surgical removal of the cat's tail. This type of surgery is performed quite often on dogs and cats.

## Indications:

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This surgery may need to be performed and can loosely be put into three categories; trauma, infection, cancer.

Trauma resulting in the tail becoming paralysed, or de-gloved (see below) are the most common causes of tail amputations in cats. Unfortunately the blood circulation to the tail is not very good, therefore damaged tails don't heal well.

- When an infection or bite wound occurs in the tail that fails to respond to antibiotics.
- If the skin on the tail has died, this can happen with severe frostbite.
- When the cat's tail is '*de-gloved*', this occurs when the skin of the tail is peeled back.
- Self-trauma, such as constant biting or chewing.
- Tumours of the tail (rare).

The most common causes of tail injury include being accidentally trapped in a door as it is closed, being run over by a vehicle and being pulled.

Amputations of the tail may be complete or partial, this depends on what type of injury has occurred and the location.

## Symptoms:

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The most obvious sign of tail trauma is a limp, flaccid tail. Some cats may also suffer from fecal and urinary incontinence. Obviously, a paralysed tail will need a complete amputation, whereas damage due to frostbite will usually involve the end of the tail.

If the tail has been broken, it may appear to have a kink or a complete bend in it.

Swelling and or discharge if your cat has an abscess or infection.

## Diagnosis:

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Your veterinarian will perform a complete physical and neurological examination of your cat and obtain a medical history from you.

Xrays will be necessary to evaluate the tail and determine the extent of the damage.

If your cat has been involved in a traffic accident or has a tumour on the tail, your veterinarian may also want to perform chest x-rays to look for signs of internal injury and signs of cancer having spread.

If amputation is recommended, your veterinarian may want to perform some routine blood tests prior to surgery to evaluate the overall health of your cat.

## **Tail amputation surgery:**

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Your cat will need to have fasted from the night before (unless your veterinarian tells you otherwise).

The cat is put under general anesthetic and the area is shaved and sterilised. The incision is made between two vertebrae and the ligaments are cut. Due to the proximity to the anus, where possible, the veterinarian will try leave a stub (one or two vertebrae of the tail), but this is not always possible. The blood vessels are cauterised to seal them and prevent bleeding. Surrounding skin is then sutured over the bone to seal the area.

If the surgery is performed due to cancer, tissue will be submitted to a laboratory for histopathology.

## **Recovery time:**

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Recovery time can vary depending on any other trauma your cat may have. If the cat has normal limb function and is able to urinate and defecate on his own, the prognosis is very good.

## **Home care:**

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Once your cat returns home, he will need to be kept quiet until he has completely healed. During this time he should not be allowed outside. Your cat may need cage rest for 1-2 weeks after surgery.

- An Elizabethan collar will be put on your cat to prevent him damaging the area.
- He will be sent home with painkillers and antibiotics. Follow your veterinarian's instruction when administering medication.
- Sutures will be removed 10-14 days after surgery.
- Monitor your cat's litter box use while he is recovering. If he has any difficulty urinating or defecating, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- He may find it difficult to climb into his litter tray for the first few days, if this happens, consider replacing it with a tray with low sides or even a very sturdy box, lined with plastic and cut one side out (I did this for my cat while he recovered from a broken pelvis). Fruit shops can often supply strong/wax-lined boxes for free.
- Complications from this surgery can be quite common, most often associated with

poor wound healing. It is important for you to monitor the area for signs of redness, swelling, heat, discharge, and infection. If you notice this, your cat will need to be seen by a veterinarian immediately.

- While the wound is healing, try to keep your cat's environment as clean as possible. Regularly change his bedding and avoid using dusty types of cat litter, paper brands are recommended while he is healing. Litter trays should be regularly scooped.

## **Prevention:**

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Obviously, nobody wants to see their cat have to lose a tail, and prevention is always better than cure.

Have your cat desexed, entire cats are much more likely to get into fights with other cats.

Never, ever pull a cat by his tail, and reinforce this message to children. Even a gentle pull can be enough to cause trauma. Very young children should ALWAYS be supervised when they are around cats and give your cat places to escape if need be.

It is always better to keep your cat indoors to avoid injury from cars, other animals or cruelty. If you don't feel comfortable having an indoor only cat, consider a compromise and build him a cat enclosure. He gets to enjoy the great outdoors but in a safe way.

Avoid slamming doors.

## **A final note:**

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Once your cat is recovered and out of his crate, you may notice his balance is affected. He will adjust to life without a tail, it will just take him a little while. It is strongly recommended you keep him indoors and try to prevent him from jumping and climbing while he is adapting.