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written by Janice W. Price, DVM

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SCHEDULING AN ANESTHETIC PROCEDURE FOR YOUR MALTESE

Sooner or later, your Maltese will need to be spayed/neutered, have its teeth cleaned, or have a lump removed. How many times have you already declined your veterinarian's recommendations for anesthetic procedures for your pet? Sadly, many of our favorite dust-mops do NOT receive these critically important services because of their owners' needless, and unfounded, fear of their pet receiving anesthesia. All too often, Maltese lives are needlessly shortened by easily treated health issues, due to their owners' fear and misinformation.

To help your comfort level when contemplating an anesthetic procedure for your Maltese, as well as to help insure your Maltese's safety during its procedure, I recommend you (DIPLOMATICALLY!) ask the following questions:

1. Will only isoflurane gas anesthesia be used with my Maltese? Maltese commonly are a bit sensitive to injectable anesthetics, and, because of their small size, are easily overdosed. Isoflurane gas anesthesia is extremely safe, and can be very precisely administered.
2. Do you have small enough endotracheal tubes for my Maltese? Endotracheal tubes are the vital airway to insure precise delivery of the isoflurane gas anesthetic to your pet, to protect your pet's lungs from fluids if it vomits, and from debris generated during a dental hygiene. Also, the veterinarian can safely ventilate your pet with a "trache tube" in place, if your pet's breathing becomes depressed during the procedure. However, Maltese are tiny, and take tiny endotracheal tubes. I generally use 3.0 mm, 3.5 mm, and 4.0 mm tubes with Maltese in the 3 lb to 7 lb category.
3. How will you monitor my Maltese during anesthesia? Problems during anesthesia are easily averted if detected early. Your Maltese's anesthetic status can be easily monitored with a pulse oximeter or an audible pulse monitor--the heart typically slows down when anesthesia is getting deeper than needed, usually well before danger levels. Respiratory monitors (apnea alerts) sound off when your pet quits breathing--I do NOT consider them adequate monitors! A well-trained technician or undistracted doctor can competently monitor your pet with a stethoscope, but commonly no personnel are available exclusively for monitoring. We use an audible pulse monitor; I stay in the treatment room the entire time during the anesthesia, and check the patient every 1-2 minutes personally.
4. How will you keep my Maltese warm during anesthesia? Pets, as well as people, will get chilled when under anesthesia unless they are kept warm. Chilled patients make poor anesthetic patients, and have greatly increased risk of problems. Acceptable methods of keeping your Maltese warm include warm water recirculating blankets, heating pads well-wrapped in towels, hot water bottles, and bags of uncooked rice heated in the microwave. We use a warm water recirculating blanket.
5. Will my Maltese's health be checked prior to anesthesia? Many early health problems, such as kidney disease, liver disease, or anemia, can be hidden on a physical examination, but readily detected with laboratory blood work. We routinely

perform Complete Blood Counts and Blood Chemistry Profiles for our patients before anesthesia, especially those 7 years or older.

6. What exactly is done to clean my Maltese's teeth? First of all, pets with gingivitis (infected gums) should be placed on oral antibiotics 2-4 days BEFORE their teeth are cleaned, to reduce the bacterial population as much as possible. Secondly, the teeth cleaning should involve an ultrasonic dental scaler, NOT just hand scaling with hand-held instruments--the latter just aren't thorough enough. Third of all, cleaning the concrete-hard tartar off dog and cat teeth always leaves tiny grooves in the tooth enamel; these grooves MUST be polished smooth with a rotary dental polisher, or the tartar will come back twice as fast. Consider changing veterinarians for your pet's dental hygiene if your current veterinarian doesn't have a proper dental polisher. Some practices will use gauze-wrapped finger tips with pumice polish to attempt to smooth the enamel--this is NOT adequate. Last of all, make sure your pet's teeth are going to receive a fluoride treatment, to help harden and toughen the enamel. This will extend the effective life of the dental hygiene remarkable. A last word: teeth cleaning is a MAINTENANCE procedure, which means it needs to be done regularly; expect your pet's teeth to need cleaning every 6 months to 2 years.
7. If my Maltese needs to have teeth extracted, how is this done? This seems simplistic, but, unfortunately, many practices use little more equipment than needle-nose pliers to extract teeth. If your Maltese has periodontal disease severe enough to necessitate extractions, your pet is already in a lot of pain; do NOT add to it by subjecting your pet to clumsy, brutal methods of dental extraction. Maltese mouths are tiny, with easily fractured jaws. Proper tooth removal includes using power equipment to section multi-rooted teeth, and surgically closing the extraction site afterwards. Find out what your veterinarian plans for your pet ahead of time.
8. What post-op pain management will my Maltese receive? Make sure your veterinarian has a plan BEFORE your pet needs pain relief. If your veterinarian has no plan, reconsider where your pet will receive its anesthetic procedure.
9. If a lump is removed from my Maltese, what will be done with it? All lumps should be sent to the pathologist for analysis; aggressive cancers can masquerade early in their career as harmless bumps; benign lesions can LOOK amazingly malignant. Only under the pathologist's microscope can we tell between benign and malignant. If your veterinarian is planning on just throwing your pet's lump away, rethink who is going to perform your pet's procedure.

So, a list of 9 questions handles MOST concerns when planning a procedure for your Maltese. Once your veterinarian has laid out the plan for your Maltese's anesthesia/surgery/dentistry, your main worry will be how to while away the hours of the day your pet spends with your vet!