Pre-operative care of Rabbits & Guinea Pigs

Any surgery can be stressful to your, and there's really no such thing as a surgery that is 100% risk free. However, the following information should help you and them get through either emergency or elective surgery with a minimum of stress, and a maximum of safety.

Pre-operative Care

- **DO NOT FAST them PRIOR TO THE SURGICAL APPOINTMENT** even if you have been asked to do so for other household pets as the same reasons do not hold true for rabbits & guinea pigs:

- Some surgical anaesthetics can cause nausea. One of the reasons vets fast most animals pre-operatively is because of the risk of vomiting during surgery or recovery. Rabbits & Guinea Pigs lack the vomiting reflex, and are physically almost incapable of regurgitation. The risk of post-operative vomiting is very low.

- Some Veterinary Surgeons may be concerned that food in the intestine will interfere with their obtaining a "true body weight," which is necessary to calculate the proper dosage of injectable anaesthetic. There are two reasons that this should not be a concern with Rabbits & Guinea Pigs.

  (i) Under normal circumstances, the intestine of a healthy rabbit or guinea pig is never empty, and should not be. Gut passage time is relatively long (approximately 12 hours), so to get the intestine completely empty would take a very long time. Also, since an anorectic rabbit or guinea pig can begin to suffer liver damage in relatively short time when the gut is empty, it is not advisable to fast them before surgery.

  (ii) If the Veterinary Surgeon is using Isoflurane or Sevoflurane, the gas anaesthetic of choice, body weight is not an issue, since the gas is administered through the respiratory tract.

- Feeding them before surgery helps the gastrointestinal (GI) tract remain active, which will speed recovery. Rabbits & Guinea Pigs who become inappetent after surgery are more difficult to "jump start" back to normal eating habits. Even relatively brief periods (24 hours) of anorexia can result in GI stasis and some liver damage.

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