

# Sedation Vs. General Anesthesia



LITTLE CREEK  
VETERINARY CLINIC

Both sedation and general anesthesia (GA) can be referred to as “anesthesia”. Both are used to keep the patient comfortable and pain free during a procedure. They reduce or eliminate the response to a painful stimulus.

## SO WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

### SEDATION

- Use of a drug via an intramuscular (IM) or intravenous (IV) injection to relax the muscles and reduce response to painful stimuli
- Often does not require an endotracheal tube to be placed
- Relaxation and reduced muscle control
- Reduced awareness of surroundings
- Can be used in conjunction with a local anesthetic (freezing or numbing of a small area) to provide additional pain relief
- Can be administered at varying levels (minimal, moderate, deep) depending on needs of veterinarian, patient and type of procedure

### GENERAL ANESTHESIA

- Starts with administration of a pre-medication, typically using a sedative and opiate combination
- Followed shortly by administration of an induction agent to completely anesthetize your pet
- Stabilization of the airway with an endotracheal tube to deliver fresh oxygen and inhalant anesthetic to your pet
- Complete loss of all consciousness
- Complete loss of pain sensation
- Used in longer duration procedures

## HOW DO WE DETERMINE WHICH TO USE?

There are many factors that go into determining which drugs are used for sedation or pre-medication, and what level of anesthesia is required to perform the required procedure. Some of these include:

- Duration of procedure – a shorter procedure may not require a general anesthetic
- Invasiveness of the procedure – typically, the more invasive, the deeper level of sedation required
- Pre-existing conditions – kidney, liver or heart disease are just a few of the conditions that will influence your veterinarian’s decision on a drug protocol. Each patient has a tailored protocol in order to maintain a high level of safety during anesthesia

## REDUCING THE RISK

Your pet is required to have a presurgical appointment before surgery. At this appointment, your veterinarian will do a full physical examination and likely recommend a blood panel to assess kidney and liver function. This information is vital in helping to assess your pet’s overall health and eligibility to undergo an anesthetic procedure.

