



ALL ABOUT REFERRALS

Seeing a specialist

When your veterinarian recommends referral to a specialist for your pet, not knowing what to expect can feel scary. After all, you may feel very comfortable with the veterinary team who cares for your pet on a regular basis and be unsure about going somewhere new, on top of worrying about your pet's health. Here are some things to know about referral, how it can benefit your pet, and where to go for care going forward.

Reasons for referral

There can be many reasons your primary veterinary team may refer your pet to a specialist. In many cases, your veterinarian wants your pet to be evaluated by a veterinarian with specialty training and expertise who can provide additional insight as to your pet's diagnosis and/or treatment. Just like in human medicine, veterinary medicine has specialists that focus on areas like dermatology, surgery, internal medicine, oncology, behavior, dentistry, and more.

Benefits of referral

Specialty practices not only have teams that have advanced training in their field of expertise, but in many cases they also have specialized equipment to diagnose and treat your pet's condition and help them feel better faster. They are often the best place for your pet to be if they need round-the-clock hospital care, advanced surgery, or ongoing management of some chronic diseases.

And if your veterinarian has already been working to manage your pet's condition for a while, referral to a specialist may provide some fresh insight into ways to keep your pet happy and comfortable.

Prepping for referral

When your veterinary team recommends referral, there can be a lot to think about, and it can be easy get overwhelmed and not absorb all the information you are given. Here's a list of some of the questions you may want to ask your veterinary team about your upcoming referral:

- Where is the specialty practice located?
- Are there multiple referral options to choose from, and if so, how do they compare?
- Which type of specialist does my pet need to see? (examples: internal medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, dermatology, behavior)
- Who will make the first appointment—the veterinary team, or me?
- Do I need to bring any records with me, or is the veterinary team sending everything over?
- Does my pet need to be fasted before the appointment?
- Should I continue my pet's medications as prescribed prior to the appointment?
- Is my pet likely to have a procedure (such as diagnostic testing or surgery) on the same day as my first appointment?
- Can you give me a cost estimate for the initial appointment (keep in mind this is usually a rough estimate that may need to be modified once your pet is evaluated by the specialist)?
- Which forms of payment/financing do they accept?
- How urgent is the need for referral?

After referral:

Where to go for continued care

Once you have been referred to a specialist for your pet's care, it can sometimes be confusing to know when to go back to your specialist versus your primary care veterinarian. While each case is different, here are some general guidelines.

See your specialist team for:

- Follow up care and ongoing management of the condition for which you were referred to them
- Questions about the treatment they prescribed or performed
- Any concerns about complications from their treatment

See your primary care team for:

- Ongoing wellness and preventive care (vaccines, annual exams, parasite prevention, nail trims, etc.)
- Diagnosis and treatment of conditions that are unrelated to the reason you were referred to a specialist
- Refills of medications originally prescribed by your primary care veterinarian
- Paperwork like health certificates for travel
- General questions about your pet's health
- Follow up and any questions about the condition your pet was referred for if your specialist team has concluded their care of your pet or if they are not available
- In some cases, your primary care team may provide some ongoing management of your pet's condition in coordination with the specialist

Your primary care team and your specialist team share the same goal of prioritizing your pet's comfort and wellbeing. They will work together to provide the care that best meets the needs of your pet and your family.

