

Can Cats Wake Up After Being “Put to Sleep”?

Arnold Plotnick, DVM, explains what happens when a cat is put to sleep.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: I recently had to put my 16-year-old cat, Max, to sleep. I brought him home and buried him. Now all I keep thinking is that he woke up. Please tell me once an animal is put to sleep they can't revive themselves.

A: I'm sorry to hear about your cat. It's understandable to have such disturbing thoughts after such a traumatic event, but I can assure you that there is no way that Max could revive himself.

Veterinarians often use the euphemism “put to sleep” to describe the procedure that we use to end a cat's life. I suspect that the word “sleep” is causing you to have these nagging thoughts, and you unconsciously may be thinking that if the cat is merely asleep, then it is theoretically possible for him to wake up. In reality, your veterinarian gave your cat an injection that stopped his heart permanently, and he passed away peacefully.

If you still find yourself bothered by these thoughts, or are having a hard time dealing with Max's death in general, ask your veterinarian if he or she can recommend a veterinary bereavement counselor. Many cities with referral hospitals offer these services for pet owners. Again, please accept my condolences on Max's death.