

The Pet Population Problem

Every year, millions of unwanted dogs and cats, including puppies and kittens, are needlessly destroyed. The good news is that every pet owner can make a difference. By having your dog or cat surgically sterilized, you will do your part to prevent the birth of unwanted puppies and kittens and you will enhance your pet's health and quality of life.

Pet Behavior And Pet Reproduction

Contrary to what some people believe, getting pregnant — even once — does not improve the behavior of female dogs and cats. In fact, the mating instinct may lead to undesirable behaviors and result in undue stress on both the owner and the animal. Also, while some pet owners may have good intentions, few are prepared for the work involved in monitoring their pet's pregnancy, caring for the newborns and locating good homes for all the offspring.



What Is Surgical Altering?

During surgical altering, a veterinarian removes certain reproductive organs. If your cat or dog is a *female*, the veterinarian will usually remove her ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus. The medical name for this operation is an ovariectomy, although it is commonly called "spaying." If your pet is a *male*, the testicles are removed and the operation is called an orchectomy, commonly referred to as castration or simply "neutering."

While both spaying and neutering are major surgical procedures, they are also the most common surgeries performed by veterinarians on cats and dogs. Before the operation, your pet is given a thorough physical examination to ensure that it is in good health. General anesthesia is administered during the surgery and medications are administered after the surgery to minimize postoperative pain. You will be asked to keep your pet calm and quiet for a few days after the surgery until the incision begins to heal.

What Are The Benefits Of Spaying And Neutering?

Both operations lead to improved long-term health, prevent unwanted litters and eliminate many behavior problems associated with the mating instinct.

Benefits To Your Female Pet

Female dogs experience a "heat" cycle approximately every six months, depending upon the breed. A female dog's heat cycle can last as long as 21 days during which your dog will leave blood stains in the house and may become anxious, short-tempered and actively seek a mate.

Female cats can come into heat every two weeks during breeding season until they become pregnant. During this time they may engage in behaviors such as frequent yowling and urination in unacceptable places.

Both female dogs and cats benefit from spaying which eliminates their heat cycles and generally reduces the negative behaviors that may lead to owner frustration and, ultimately, a decision to relinquish the pet to a shelter. Most importantly, early spaying of female dogs and cats helps protect them from serious health problems later in life such as uterine infections and breast cancer.

Benefits To Your Male Pet

At maturity (on average, 6-9 months of age), male dogs and cats are capable of breeding. Both male dogs and cats are likely to begin "marking" their territories by spraying strong-smelling urine on your furniture, curtains, and in virtually any part of the house. Also, given the slightest chance, males may attempt to escape from home and roam in search of a mate. Dogs seeking a female in heat can become aggressive and may injure themselves and people by engaging in fights.

Neutering male dogs and cats reduces the breeding instinct and can have a calming effect that makes them less inclined to roam and more content to stay at home. Neutering your male pet also improves his health by reducing the risk of prostate disease, testicular cancer and infections.

What Is The Best Age To Spay Or Neuter My Pet?

A dog or cat can be surgically altered at almost any age. Your veterinarian can advise you on the most appropriate time for your particular pet based upon its breed, age and physical condition.

Will The Surgery Affect My Pet's Disposition Or Metabolism?

The procedure has no effect on a pet's intelligence or ability to learn, play, work or hunt. Most pets tend to be better behaved following the operation, making them more desirable companions. Contrary to popular belief, the surgery will not make your pet fat.

A balanced diet and exercise will keep your pet from experiencing the health risks associated with obesity. Ask your veterinarian to advise you on the best diet and exercise plan for your pet for each stage of its life.

Is The Expense For The Surgery Really Worth It?

Yes! This is a one-time expense that can dramatically improve your pet's quality of life. If you are still uncertain whether or not to proceed with the surgery, consider the expense to society of collecting and caring for all the unwanted, abused, or abandoned animals being housed in shelters.

Having your pet spayed or neutered is a part of responsible pet ownership and an important investment in your pet's long-term good health.

And Now A Note On Your Pet's *General Good Health*

A healthy pet is a happy companion. Your pet's daily well-being requires regular care and close attention to any hint of ill health. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests that you consult your veterinarian if your pet shows any of the following signs:

- Lumps or swelling
- Reduced or excessive appetite or water intake
- Marked weight loss or gain
- Limping, stiffness, or difficulty getting up or down
- Difficult, discolored, excessive or uncontrolled waste elimination (urine and feces)
- Abnormal discharges from any body opening
- Head shaking, scratching, licking, or coat irregularities
- Changes in behavior or fatigue
- Foul breath or excessive tartar deposits on teeth

Pets age more rapidly than people and can develop disease conditions that can go unnoticed, even to the most attentive pet owner. Veterinarians are skilled in detecting conditions that have gradual onset and subtle signs. Early detection allows problems to be treated most easily and affordably. Help foster early detection and treatment by scheduling regular examinations.



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What you should know about **Spaying** — and — **Neutering**



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