



Spaying and Neutering

Spaying and neutering is probably the most important procedure associated with responsible pet care. Every pet, except those being used strictly for breeding or showing purposes, should be spayed or neutered. Also, any pet that has any access to the outdoors should be spayed or neutered to prevent any unwanted litters.



What's the difference between spaying and neutering?

Females are considered to be “spayed” while males are said to be “neutered.” The end result is the same, though – no sexual reproduction can take place.

What are the advantages of spaying/neutering?

In males, a number of undesirable behavioral changes start to take place around 8-9 months of age, and sometimes sooner than that. He will become territorial and start to “mark” areas by spraying very strong-smelling urine on vertical objects. If allowed outside, he will stray farther and farther away from home, looking for females. This instinct is so strong that he will be oblivious to the busy road between him and a potential mate, and will get into fights with other male cats. He will almost certainly come home with bite wound abscesses (draining, open sores), which will cost you when you have to have the abscess drained and treated by a veterinarian. Also, if he continues to follow this lifestyle, eventually he will probably become infected with feline leukemia (FeLV) or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) – the equivalents of human leukemia and HIV. To learn more about these diseases, see *The Cat Practice's Guide To: Feline Leukemia and FIV*. If neutered, the tom cat will lose the desire to roam the neighborhood looking for females. This will decrease his chances of being hit by a car or infected with FeLV or FIV. Also, he will be less inclined to mark his territory, and his urine will lose the characteristic strong “tom cat” smell. For those men who think neutering a male cat is inhumane, keep in mind that cats have no concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering will not change his personality (except in a good way), and he will not suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis after neutering.

In females, the first heat cycles start at around 5-6 months of age. You will notice her becoming very affectionate and will roll around on the floor (and probably sticking her rear end up in the air as high as she can). She will become more vocal and will probably start howling in the middle of the night. She may also exhibit clear vaginal discharge. Females will go into heat for about a week at a time every two to three weeks until she is mated. This behavior and the pheromones she is releasing will attract males from miles around, which will be prowling around your house, hoping for a chance with your sweet little girl (and she would be only too happy to oblige). Unspayed females also run the risk of being much more likely to develop uterine or mammary cancer later in life. A female should be spayed before her first heat cycle to reduce these risks (and save your sanity). Female cats can be spayed during a heat cycle, but the veterinarian should be aware of this, since there can be an increase in bleeding since the blood vessels are dilated.

When should I spay/neuter my cat?

Neutering can be done as soon as the testicles are fully descended into the scrotum. Usually the veterinarian will want him to reach a certain weight before anesthetizing him.

Spaying should be done at around 5 months of age – before the first heat cycle. Some clinics will spay cats very young, and there has been some controversy on whether it causes incontinence to be spayed as a tiny kitten. We prefer to wait until she is about 5 months old.



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What is involved in the spaying/neutering procedure?

All cats should be fasted for 12 hours prior to surgery. This means all food should be withheld, although water can still be offered.

Neutering is done under general anesthesia. The scrotum area is then clipped free of hair and is surgically scrubbed. The testes are removed through two small incisions made in the scrotal sac. The blood vessels are then tied off and the incisions are closed using surgical glue. Usually, no sutures are used unless the cat is very large and the incisions are too big to be closed with surgical glue. It is a very short procedure and the cat is sent home the very same day. Usually, the cat will not act like he had undergone anesthesia at all and will be bouncing around the house like normal the same night.

Spaying is also done under general anesthesia. The abdomen is clipped free of hair and is surgically scrubbed. A small incision is made along the midline where there are fewer blood vessels. A special surgical tool is used to locate the uterus and uterine horns (where the ovaries are located). The blood vessels are tied off and the uterus and uterine horns are completely removed. The inner body wall is sutured with absorbable suture material and then the outside skin layer is closed. There is no need to come back for suture removal since they will absorb on their own, unless your doctor informs you otherwise.

Are there any complications associated with the procedures or recovery?

As with any general anesthesia, there are always risks. However, we take every precaution to minimize these risks. A doctor will perform a full physical examination including listening to the heart for any abnormalities. A preanesthetic blood profile will be run on your cat before any surgical procedure – this will ensure all the organ systems are in good working order before undergoing anesthesia. Also, we use electronic monitors as well as manual monitoring to make sure everything goes smoothly during the procedure.

Especially with spaying (which is more invasive than neutering), postoperative care is important. She will be able to go home the same day but there are some specific precautions to take at home to facilitate an uneventful recovery. Females should be confined to a small room where she won't be able to run around vigorously for at least 2-3 days. If left to run and jump around the house, the internal sutures will start to rub on the tissue, and a fluid-filled pocket (called a seroma), will form under the incision site. These are not usually painful to the cat and will need to be allowed to go away on its own.

As with any incision, it should be monitored daily. Watch for any swelling, redness, heat, excessive pain, or discharge during the healing process. If your cat is constantly licking the site, they may introduce bacteria into the incision and cause an infection. Your cat may need to be fitted with a special collar to discourage licking. If you notice any of these signs, call your veterinary hospital for instructions.

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