



Spay and Neuter Information

There are many factors to consider in deciding whether to spay or neuter your pet, or to use them for breeding. First, there is a serious pet overpopulation problem and any offspring your pet produces can only add to that problem. There are also many health and behavioral benefits to spaying and neutering, which we will outline for you. Also, if breeding is something you are considering see the section at the end of this handout for several things you should be aware of. In general, if you are not planning to use your pet for breeding, you should have them spayed or neutered. The appropriate time to spay or neuter is usually around 6 months, your veterinarian will let you know if they recommend something different for your pet.

There are many myths about spaying and neutering, you may have heard some of them.

- *Females should have a heat cycle before spaying.* Not true except in rare cases (explained in spay section below)
- *Females should have a litter before spaying.* There is no medical or psychological reason for a pet to have a litter before spaying.
- *Watching the dog or cat give birth is the best way for the children to experience the miracle of life.* There are other, more responsible resources available (try looking on the internet) to achieve this goal.
- *Spaying or neutering will make my pet fat.* Too many calories and not enough exercise will make your pet fat. After spay or neuter, your pet's metabolism will change and they will need only about 65% of the calories they did before surgery. If you adjust their diet accordingly and do not feed free-choice (when food is available all the time) then your pet will not get fat.
- *My pet will not feel whole or will miss out on something if spayed or neutered.* The drive to reproduce is very powerful, but they do not miss it when it is gone. Sexual intercourse for animals is an instinct, not a voluntary pleasurable activity. Animals also have no emotional drive to be parents. It is less stressful for a pet to be spayed or neutered than to be intact and have the drive to reproduce and not be allowed to follow that instinct. They also have no concept of how it "feels" to be male or female. Gender roles do not have the same meaning for pets.
- *I can't afford to spay/neuter.* The diseases and problems and offspring caused by not spaying or neutering are far more expensive. If you think you can't afford the surgery, you definitely can't afford not to. See your local humane organization for help with the surgery cost. In most cases, they would rather help pay for the surgery than try to place your pet's unwanted litter into good homes. In addition,

spayed and neutered animals don't need as much food, as mentioned above. That's less you have to buy and saves you money!

- *Spaying or neutering will change my pet's personality.* Not true. Your pet is who they are. The surgery may change some of their behavior, especially if done after sexual maturity, but behavior is not the same as personality.

Spay

Spaying is the surgical removal of the female's ovaries and uterus, which also eliminates the hormones these organs produce. Health benefits of spaying include eliminating the risk of ovarian and uterine cancers, and a drastic decrease in risk for mammary tumors. The most benefit occurs if the spay is done before the first heat cycle, which usually occurs between 6 and 10 months of age. Spaying completely eliminates the risk of pyometra, which is a life-threatening infection of the uterus which occurs in up to 20% of unspayed females that never have a litter. Spaying also eliminates the risk of false pregnancy, a disorder where the female has the hormones of pregnancy present and they may produce milk and "mother" inanimate objects. Spaying slightly increases the risk of future urinary incontinence in some breeds, discuss with your veterinarian if your pet is one of them.

When dogs are in heat they will often have bloody vaginal discharge and make a mess in the house. The drive to reproduce is very intense and preventing breeding is more difficult than you would think. Males can detect a female in heat a mile away and may camp out by your house and wait. Cats in heat typically vocalize frequently (often described as "yowling") and rub on everything in sight, causing many owners to request an "emergency" spay or worse, to let the cat outside so they don't have to listen to it, where she will promptly get pregnant. Heat behaviors usually last about 3 weeks and happen 2-3 times a year in the dog and can occur up to once a month in the cat. Heats can also be "silent", especially in dogs, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy when no one knew they were supposed to be keeping her away from intact males. Intact females also tend to have more aggression and moodiness with people (especially children!) and other pets than spayed females.

Neuter

Neutering means surgical removal of the testicles. The scrotum is usually left in place unless it is very pendulous. Neutering eliminates the risk of testicular cancer, which is especially common in males in which one or both testicles have not descended into the scrotum (called 'cryptorchidism'). Neutering decreases the risk of non-cancerous prostate problems, anal cancers, and hernias. The biggest benefits of neutering are probably the behavioral ones. It reduces escaping and roaming behavior by 90% when they are not driven by finding females in heat. Consequently, the risk of being hit by a car or other trauma from fighting with other animals or being shot for being in someone else's yard in pursuit of females is also drastically reduced. Territorial behavior, urine marking behavior, and aggressive behavior toward other animals and people are drastically reduced, especially if they are neutered young before these behaviors have a chance

become habit. Housetraining is made easier by taking away the urge to mark. In fact, some males become impossible to housetrain if you wait too long to neuter.

Breeding

If you are still considering breeding, here is some food for thought. You should wait until your pet is 2 years of age to breed. You should have an annual CERF eye certification and all breed specific health clearances performed – check with your veterinarian and national breed club. A *Brucella canis* test should be performed one month in advance of breeding and a complete physical examination performed by a veterinarian prior to breeding. Also ask yourself the following questions:

- Will your pet contribute excellent health, temperament, working ability, or conformity to the breed standard?
- Do you understand that spaying and neutering has health and behavioral benefits that you are giving up by keeping your pet intact?
- Are you aware of *any and all* health and temperament problems in your pet's pedigree?
- Are you willing to search for the best breeding match for your pet, even if it means traveling out of state?
- Do you have carefully screened buyers and deposits for all the puppies or kittens you may produce?
- Do you have money set aside in case the dam or the offspring need emergency care, such as a cesarean section?
- Can you or another responsible adult be present 24 hours a day for the first 3 weeks in case hand feeding is required?
- Have you read about what to prepare for and expect for breeding, pregnancy, birth, and care of newborn puppies and kittens?
- Are you willing to keep and properly socialize all offspring until at least 8 weeks of age (or longer if a suitable home has not been found)?
- Are you willing to have proper deworming, first vaccines, and a health check by a veterinarian on all offspring prior to going to a new home?
- Are you willing to take back offspring at any time in their lives that they may no longer be wanted?
- Are you willing to serve as a lifetime resource for buyers of your pet's offspring?