

## **Ask the Vet: Why should I get my pet spayed or neutered?**

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Spaying (females) or neutering (males) animals is the act of surgically removing the reproductive organs. It is highly recommended for any pets not intended for breeding purposes and has many advantages. Obviously the first and foremost benefit is to reduce the number of puppies and kittens born. There are millions of pets nationwide needing a home, either from a shelter, humane society, or a reputable breeder. Overpopulation is a serious concern in many parts of the country as there are not enough homes for all of these animals and cities, counties, and shelters struggle with funding to care for them for any length of time. Even if you only have one dog, it always seems a stray or neighbor dog will find her when she is in season. It only takes one 'oops' for you to be taking care of a litter of puppies.

Also, pregnancy itself is not without consequences. Especially young and old animals have a harder time carrying and caring for a litter in addition to the resources needed for their own health. These animals are more likely to need a cesarean (c-section), which can be a risky surgery for the mother as well as the young. Even in healthy animals, complications can ultimately lead to death of pups, kittens, or their moms.

Another important reason to spay or neuter your pet is to decrease their risk of cancer and other diseases later on in life. Spaying a female dog prior to her first heat cycle reduces her chance of mammary (breast) cancer by many times, and spaying her before her second heat cycle reduces her risk, but not as significantly. Mammary tumors are not uncommon in older intact dogs and are often very aggressive, spread quickly, and can be life threatening. Intact female dogs are also at risk for pyometra, or infection of the uterus. These infections also are very serious and need to be treated quickly or they can spread and threaten the life of your pet. Intact males are also at risk for multiple forms of testicular cancer, and the chances of a particular cancer are greatly increased if a dog has a retained testicle, where one of the testes remains in the abdomen and does not move normally down to the scrotum.

Spaying and neutering also has behavioral advantages for your pet. Neutering a cat reduces 'spraying' of urine inappropriately, and neutering a dog reduces inappropriate urine 'marking'. This is best accomplished if neutered before puberty, which is often when the bad behavior begins. Intact males also can be more aggressive, have a greater tendency to stray and roam, and potentially bother the neighbors, their pets, or their livestock. They may be captured by the police and brought to the pound, or may be injured or killed running on the road or causing trouble. A female going through her heat cycle can also display some unsightly behavior; just ask anyone who has had an intact cat or dog in the house.

These are just some of the advantages to getting your pet 'fixed'. We try to keep fees for spaying and neutering reasonable, and it is ultimately in your pet's best interest. The old wives' tale of waiting to spay your dog until she has had a litter of pups is simply not true. It will negate many of the health benefits of spaying, and will lead to that many more pups that need homes. So follow Bob Barker's advice!