

SPAY OR NEUTER WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT

One of the most common questions veterinarians hear each week is, *“When should I spay or neuter my dog or cat?”* With so much conflicting advice from friends, breeders, and the Internet, it can be difficult to find an answer, which is why the best option is to talk to your pet’s veterinarian.



If clients are not planning to breed their pets, we typically recommend spaying female dogs or cats when they are 4 to 6 months old, before the first heat cycle, due to the medical benefits.

If you spay a dog after her first heat cycle, she goes from having a 0.5% risk of developing mammary tumors up to an 8% risk. If you wait until after her second heat cycle, it’s almost a 26% risk.”

This benefit extends to cats as well. According to the American College of Veterinary Surgeons (ACVS), kittens spayed before 6 months old are seven times less likely to develop mammary cancer.

We also suggest spaying dogs to avoid pyometra, a life-threatening infection of the uterus. By age 4, 15.2% of unaltered female dogs will develop pyometra. By age 10, that risk rises to 23–24 percent.

While the risk is reduced if the dog has several litters, a spay surgery, which removes the uterus and ovaries, eliminates the risk completely.

Neutering a young dog or cat is a simple procedure that may be performed as early as 8 weeks of age.

One major health benefit to neutering a dog is that it virtually eliminates the risk of prostate issues, including infection and prostatic hyperplasia, an enlargement of the prostate that creates difficulty defecating.

By age 6, 75–80 percent of unaltered male dogs will have benign prostatic hyperplasia, thanks to testosterone. By age 9, it’s 95–100 percent. If you neuter them, you take that risk away. Neutering dogs also prevents the spread of transmissible venereal tumors (a sexually transmitted disease) and perineal hernias, in which testosterone weakens the muscles around the anus and allows abdominal content to push through, while neutering cats protects against testicular cancer.

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Neutering also reduces or eliminates unwanted behaviors like spraying in male cats, roaming in dogs, and aggression “before they’ve had all that testosterone build up in their system.

Some pet owners may have concerns that sterilizing their pets will lead to obesity. Although this is a valid concern, proper diet and exercise can easily solve the issue.

As a pet owner, we have control of the food. Most dogs and cats can’t access the refrigerator or our food. That should be a non-issue when deciding whether to spay or neuter.

Other pet owners say they want to wait to spay their dogs or cats until after they produce a litter so their children can witness the “miracle of birth.” However, not every birth is smooth, and animals shouldn’t have a litter until they have reached full adult size if they are to be bred responsibly. Instead, we suggest these clients should consider fostering a pregnant dog or cat from a local animal shelter if you want to have this “experience”. Then you’re doing a good deed and not bringing even more animals into the world.

We also hear concerns about the risks of anesthesia. Sunshine Animal Hospital, as an AAHA accredited veterinary hospital, we mandate excellent anesthesia protocols that make the risk of anesthesia for young, healthy animals “astronomically low.

Finally, spaying and neutering pets is important not just from a health and behavior standpoint, but because it helps address the issue of pet overpopulation. Each year, approximately 1.2 million dogs and 1.4 million cats are euthanized in the U.S., according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).