

Spaying and neutering

Gonadectomy: veterinary resources

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Many pet owners opt to spay or neuter their pets, and spaying and neutering are important for reducing pet overpopulation.

What are the options?

If you decide to spay or neuter your pet, you have options. Discuss the options with your veterinarian so you can make a decision that's right for you, your family and your pet.

Surgical sterilization

During surgical sterilization, a veterinarian removes certain reproductive organs.

- *Ovariohysterectomy, or the typical "spay":* the ovaries, fallopian tubes and uterus are removed from a female dog or cat. This makes her unable to reproduce and eliminates her heat cycle and breeding instinct-related behavior.
- *Orchiectomy, or the typical "neuter":* the testes are removed from a male dog or cat. This makes him unable to reproduce and reduces or eliminates male breeding behaviors.

Surgical alternatives to traditional spaying and neutering

The procedures described above are the surgical procedures routinely used to spay or neuter dogs, but some pet owners opt for one of these alternatives:

- *Hysterectomy:* the uterus and part of the fallopian tubes are removed from a female dog or cat. This makes her unable to reproduce, but her ovaries remain and will produce hormones. This may not eliminate the dog or cat's behaviors associated with the breeding instinct.
- *Vasectomy:* only the vas deferens, which conducts sperm from the testes, are removed. This procedure makes the dog or cat unable to reproduce, but his testes remain and will produce hormones. This may not eliminate the dog or cat's behaviors associated with the breeding instinct.
- *Ovariectomy:* the ovaries are removed from a female dog or cat, but the uterus remains. Similar to ovariohysterectomy, this makes her unable to reproduce and eliminates her heat cycle and breeding instinct-related behavior.



Nonsurgical sterilization

There is an approved product on the market used to neuter male cats and dogs that is injected into the testes to stop sperm production and render the dog or cat infertile. Because not all of the hormone-producing cells of the testes are affected by the drug, the testis will continue to produce some hormones. As research continues, additional products for nonsurgical sterilization may be developed.

Why spay or neuter?

Every year, millions of unwanted dogs and cats, including puppies and kittens, are euthanized. The good news is that responsible pet owners can make a difference. By having your dog or cat sterilized, you will do your part to prevent the birth of unwanted puppies and kittens. Spaying and neutering prevent unwanted litters, help protect against some serious health problems, and may reduce many of the behavioral problems associated with the mating instinct.

Removing a female dog or cat's ovaries eliminates heat cycles and generally reduces the unwanted behaviors that may lead to owner frustration. Removing the testes from male dogs and cats reduces the breeding instinct, making them less inclined to roam and more content to stay at home.

Early spaying of female dogs and cats can help protect them from some serious health problems later in life such as uterine infections and breast cancer. Neutering your male pet can also lessen its risk of developing benign prostatic hyperplasia (enlarged prostate gland) and testicular cancer.

The procedure has no effect on a pet's intelligence or ability to learn, play, work or hunt. Some pets tend to be better behaved following surgical removal of their ovaries or testes, making them more desirable companions.

What are the risks of spaying and neutering?

Although reproductive hormones cause mating behaviors that may be undesirable for many pet owners, these hormones also affect your pet's overall health and can be beneficial. Removing your pet's ovaries or testes removes these hormones and can result in increased risk of health problems such as urinary incontinence and some types of cancer. Talk to your veterinarian about the benefits and risks of the sterilization procedure so you can make an informed decision.

While both spaying and neutering are major surgical procedures, they are also the most common surgeries performed by veterinarians on cats and dogs. Like any surgical procedure, sterilization is associated with some anesthetic and surgical risk, but the overall incidence of complications is very low.

Before the procedure, your pet is given a thorough physical examination to ensure that he/she is in good health. General anesthesia is administered to perform the surgery and medications are given to minimize pain. You will be asked to keep your pet calm and quiet for a few days after surgery as the incision begins to heal.

When should I spay or neuter my pet?

Consult your veterinarian about the most appropriate time to spay or neuter your pet based upon his/her breed, age and physical condition. Keep in mind that, contrary to popular belief, it may NOT be best to wait until your female dog or cat has gone through her first heat cycle.

How do I decide?

Discuss your options with your veterinarian so you can get answers and make an educated decision.

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