



What is Spaying and Neutering?

Too Many Pets, Not Enough Homes

Each year approximately 6.5 million animals are sent to animal shelters across the country. Approximately 3.2 million shelter animals are adopted and about 710,000 animals entered as strays are returned to their owners. Unfortunately, approximately 1.5 million shelter animals are euthanized each year.

The good news is that this fact of today can change. The tragedy of too many pets and not enough homes can be prevented by spaying and neutering our animal companions.

What is Spaying and Neutering?

Sometimes referred to as "altering," spaying and neutering are ways of providing birth control for dogs and cats by removing their reproductive organs, thereby preventing them from having litters of puppies or kittens. Spaying is the procedure used for female pets, and neutering generally refers to the procedure used for male pets.

Why Should I Know About This?

In one way or another, all of us — including those who do not even have pets — are affected by animal overpopulation. Millions of tax dollars are spent annually to care for lost, abandoned, and unwanted pets. . . and millions more are spent to put to sleep those that were not fortunate enough to find a home. The health and safety of our communities is another concern. The greater the population of unwanted animals, the greater the incidence of such animal-related issues such as rabies, dog bites, cat scratches, traffic accidents, and animal abuse.

Benefits of Spaying or Neutering

Having your pet spayed or neutered benefits both you and your pet. Your pet can enjoy a longer life and better health, and you get peace of mind knowing your animal companion is safer and happier. Some specific benefits are:

- Reduced risk of breast, uterine, and ovarian cancer or infection in female cats and dogs
- Reduced risk of testicular and prostate cancer or maladies in male cats and dogs
- No unwanted pregnancies
- Reduced incidence of aggressive behavior in male cats and dogs
- Reduced desire to roam, breed, mark territory, fight with other animals for male cats and dogs
- Reduced desire to roam, breed for female cats and dogs
- Helps alleviate the dog and cat overpopulation problem

Some Common Myths

Myth #1: My pet will get fat and lazy.

Spaying or neutering may diminish your pet's overall activity level, the natural tendency to wander, and hormonal balances, which may influence appetite. Pets that become fat and lazy after being altered usually are overfed and do not get enough exercise.

Myth #2: If we breed Rover and Fluffy, their puppies (or kittens) will be just like them.

Breeding two purebred animals rarely results in offspring that are exactly like one of the parents. And with mixed breeds, it is virtually impossible to have offspring that are exactly like one of the parents.

Myth #3: My pet's personality will change.

Any change will be for the better! After being altered, your pet will be less aggressive toward other dogs or cats, have a better personality, and will be less likely to wander. Spraying (urine marking), which is often done by dogs and cats to mark their territory, diminishes or ceases after pets are altered.

Myth #4: My children should witness our pet giving birth.

Pets often have their litters in the middle of the night or in a place of their own choosing. Because pets need privacy when giving birth, any unnecessary intrusion can cause the mother to become seriously upset. These intrusions can result in an unwillingness to care for the offspring or injury to the owners of the pet.

Myth #5: I am concerned about my pet undergoing anesthesia.

Placing a pet under anesthesia is a very common concern of owners. Although there is always a slight risk involved, the anesthetics currently used by veterinarians are very safe. Many veterinarians use equipment that monitors heart and upper respiratory rates during surgery to ensure that their patients are doing well under anesthesia. The medical benefits of having your pet spayed or neutered far outweigh the slight risk involved with undergoing anesthesia. Consult your veterinarian if you are concerned about this aspect of the procedure.

Myth #6: The surgery is painful for the animal and may harm my pet.

During spaying / neutering, dogs and cats are fully anesthetized, so they feel no pain. Afterwards, most pets seem to experience some discomfort, but all signs of discomfort disappear within a few days or even a few hours. Serious harm as a result of spay / neuter surgery is extremely rare.

Myth #7: The surgery is expensive.

Spay/neuter surgery generally costs less than most major surgeries, especially if the dog or cat is young and healthy. Also, many areas have low-cost or low-income spay/neuter clinics or programs in which local veterinarians perform spaying / neutering at reduced cost. For information on these low-cost options, contact the Blue Ridge Humane Society.