

Newsletter Topic: spay/neuter (LP)

Why spay and neuter?

Here at Countryside Veterinary Clinic, we recommend spaying and neutering dogs and cats that are not intended for breeding programs or competitions that require they be intact. Why? The answer is simple – it's what's best for their health!

“Spay” and “neuter” are both terms used for rendering a pet sterile, which is accomplished through surgical removal of the reproductive organs. Female animals undergo an ovariectomy, or spay, during which the ovaries and uterus are removed. Male animals undergo a neuter, or castration, during which the testicles and spermatic cord are removed. We recommend spaying and neutering dogs and cats at 6 months of age.

Spaying and neutering dogs and cats has many health benefits, including reducing or eliminating the risks of cancers associated with reproductive organs. In female pets, these benefits are maximized if the pet is spayed before the onset of the first heat cycle, which usually occurs after 6 months of age. Non-cancerous medical conditions, such as pyometra (infection of the uterus) and prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate), are both potentially serious conditions that can occur in unaltered pets. In addition to the health benefits, spaying neutering pets can help prevent undesired behaviors such as fighting, urine marking, and roaming.

Just as with humans, complications associated with pregnancy are not uncommon in female pets, and treatment can be costly – especially if surgery is required. Before a decision to breed a female is made, it is the owner's responsibility to weigh the risks to the pet and potential expenses against the benefits of having a litter.

Here are some common reasons given by people who are reluctant to sterilize their pets, and why we feel spaying and neutering should still be considered:

- “It's unnecessary – I'll just keep my pet away from unaltered animals.”

- ▶ Remember, intact animals have a natural and instinctive desire to seek a mate, and males and females alike will try to escape if they see an opportunity to do so.

- “It seems kind of mean.”

- ▶ Animals are not conscious of the same standards humans are. In other words, they don't feel they are incomplete or less fulfilled just because they are spayed or neutered. In fact, it is kinder to sterilize an animal that is not intended for breeding because their bodies will produce a much lower level of the hormones that instill in them the urge to mate. This often makes them better suited as companion animals.

- “The surgery is expensive!”

▶ Surgery may seem expensive, but remember, it is a one-time procedure that helps prevent an array of health problems, many of which could also be costly. Providing proper care for litters of puppies or kittens is not cheap either.

- “My pet will get fat!”

▶ Spaying and neutering does not make an animal fat, however the caloric needs of the pet may decrease once the reproductive organs are removed. It may be necessary to reduce your pet’s diet after surgery to keep it at a healthy weight.

- “I’m thinking of breeding.”

▶ The decision to breed a pet should not be made lightly. It takes money, time, research, patience, and a commitment to the animals involved as well as a deep understanding of the selected breed. In order to maximize the health benefits, dogs and cats should be spayed and neutered at six months of age, so if an owner is not sure they want to breed, the best thing for the pet is to have it altered.

- “I’ve heard my pet won’t develop properly if he or she is altered too young.”

▶ While it is true that animals altered before they reach sexual maturity may not display all of the secondary sex characteristics of the breed (ex. Broad head and heavy muscle development in males), these things are cosmetic only and do not affect the animal’s overall health.

- “For a female, I heard it’s better to wait until after the first heat cycle”

▶ This is false. If spayed before the first heat cycle, the risk of developing mammary tumors is reduced to less than 1%. If spayed after one heat cycle, the pet has an 8% chance of developing breast cancer.

Please call or stop by Countryside Veterinary Clinic for more information about spaying or neutering your pet. *Remember, it’s what’s best for their health.*