

Prevent More Than Just Babies – The Benefits of Spay and Neuter



It is fairly common knowledge that pets need to be “fixed” to prevent them from having babies, even among people without pets. Having a pet “fixed” refers to procedures called “spay” (ovariohysterectomy) for a female and “neuter” (castration) for a male, where the organs responsible for reproduction (ovaries and uterus, and testicles) are surgically removed from the body. Pets undergoing these procedures are fully anesthetized so they cannot feel pain, and usually only

experience a few days of mild discomfort and swelling post-operation. After the procedure, the pet is no longer able to produce offspring, which dramatically cuts down the number of unwanted or abandoned dogs and cats.

REDUCE STRAY POPULATIONS

You may have heard celebrities spouting a slogan to get your pets spayed and neutered and wondered why there would be a need for the advertisement. Even if you plan on keeping your pet in the house, accidents can happen and your pet can get loose. Loose intact pets can quickly find and breed with stray and feral cats and dogs, which contributes to a very serious problem. Unfortunately, stray dogs and cats can be a major source of disease, property damage, and injury. Preventing pets from being able to contribute to feral populations is a major step in reducing stray populations. Each female dog can give birth to 70 puppies over her lifetime, and each female cat can give birth to 180 kittens over her lifetime. Those numbers are impressive enough on their own, but the true gravity of the situation is only apparent when you remember that every intact female is also producing offspring at the same time as her previous litters. Dogs and cats reach sexual maturity around six months of age – meaning that over six years one intact female cat or dog can be responsible for the birth of around 70,000 direct descendants. That is a huge family tree! In the United States, nearly 30 million cats and dogs are born each day, with around 4 million being euthanized in shelters due to lack of available homes. While this number is quite high, it used to be much worse before the spay and neuter procedures became part of routine pet care. In the early 1970s, 13.5



million dogs and cats were euthanized each year due to the lack of available homes. We can continue the downward trend of stray euthanasia by continuing to spay and neuter our pets.

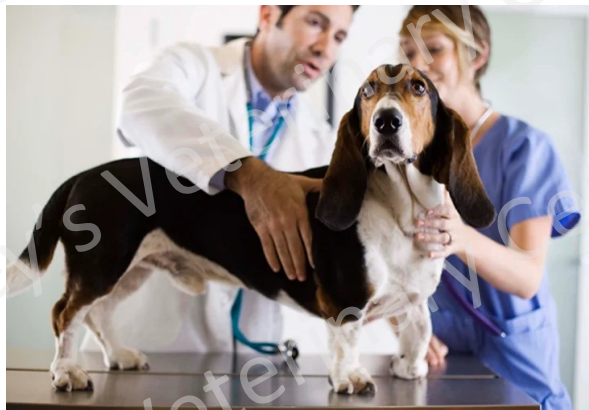
REDUCE DANGEROUS BEHAVIORS

Not only does spaying and neutering your pets help reduce the population of strays, but it also imparts benefits directly to the pet itself! These benefits come in the form of behavioral changes and reduced risk factors. People hesitant about these procedures often associate spay and neuter with negative behavioral changes, such as becoming lazy or depressed. Reduced overall activity level is common, but it is usually not caused by the procedure – the surgery is usually performed right before



the pet reaches sexual maturity, which is a transitional period between puppyhood/kittenhood and adulthood. Even intact pets naturally slow down a bit as they reach maturity, but because spay/neuter procedures occur around the same time, these procedures are often blamed for lethargic behavior. While these procedures do not cause lethargy, it is true that removal of the reproductive organs reduces the production of certain hormones, which does alter behavior. However, the behaviors that are altered by these procedures are usually related to dominance or aggression, wandering far from home, and scent-marking (urinating on objects). These behaviors are directly tied to finding and protecting mates, and reduction of the hormones related to mating does away with the need for these behaviors. This means the likelihood of injury is also reduced for your pet – less aggression leads to less fighting and fewer bite wounds, and less wandering means fewer instances of close-contact with moving vehicles or other neighborhood dangers.

PREVENT DISEASE IN YOUR PET



Finally, the spay and neuter procedures greatly reduce the risks of certain health problems intact animals face. This reduction of risk is so great that it could be argued that spaying or neutering a non-breeding pet results in a longer lifespan. Studies from the University of Georgia and Banfield Pet Hospitals have shown “fixed” dogs and cats live on average between 25% and 65% longer than their intact counterparts. Intact males are at a fairly high risk of testicular cancer as they age – it is estimated that one out of every

four intact male dogs develop testicular tumors at some point in their lives. The neuter



procedure removes the testicles and thus removes the possibility for testicular cancer. Likewise, a spay that removes the ovaries and the uterus of a female removes the risk of ovarian and uterine cancers. Though not as common as testicular cancer in males, we have seen some devastating ovarian tumors in female dogs in our office – with one as large as 8lbs. The benefit to removing these cancer-risk organs cannot be overstated.

Cancers of the reproductive organs can be prevented through removal, but there are still other health benefits to the removal of these organs. Neutered males have a greatly reduced risk of prostate enlargement due to the reduction of testosterone. Half of all intact male dogs suffer from prostate enlargement by the age of four years, and acute prostatitis can cause your pet to become quite sick if left untreated, though this condition is fairly rare. Similar risk reductions can be seen in spayed females. As they age, intact females become more and more at risk of developing tumors of the mammary glands (breast cancer). Intact females are also at risk of developing a pyometra – a potentially fatal infection of the uterus where the organ fills with infected fluid and pus. A pyometra behaves similarly to appendicitis, where the organ fills with infection to the point of rupture, causing sepsis. The only cure for a pyometra is removal of the organ.

We and our pets are lucky to live in a time where modern medicine allows these procedures to be quick, safe, and routine. In fact, these procedures have become so routine that the health risks associated with not getting the procedure are fairly unknown among pet owners. Recently, several clients with struggling patients have relayed to our staff that they were not aware of the health benefits of the spay/neuter procedures and that they regretted forgoing the surgeries when their pets were younger. We wanted to spread the word to pet owners and help them make informed decisions regarding their pet's health. We encourage you to talk to your veterinarian about spaying or neutering your pet!

