

Neutering Your Dog/Cat

Peter S. Sakas DVM, MS

Niles Animal Hospital and Bird Medical Center

7278 N. Milwaukee Ave. Niles, IL 60714

Ph 847-647-9325 Fax 847-647-8498

Neutering is a word that refers to essentially making the gender of the pet “neutral” so to speak, so it does encompass **both** males and females. Popularly, however, the term has become used to designate altering the male, while spaying is the term used for altering the female.

Castration (or orchietomy) is the proper term used for the **neutering** of the male dog; as in the procedure the testicles are removed. Some people believe that a vasectomy is done, but that is incorrect. The goal is not to only prevent sperm release, rather to eliminate the male sex hormones and the effects it has on the body. By eliminating the testosterone it dramatically reduces the risk of prostate disease (cancer, infection, benign hypertrophy), eliminates the risk of testicular cancer and perineal hernias (hernias around the anal area), reduces the urge for urine marking, calms aggressive tendencies and sexual behavior as well as eliminating sperm production/release. It is recommended to perform the procedure when the dog is 6-7 months of age, before these hormonal behaviors become ingrained in the dog.

Some people believe by neutering the male they become fat and inactive, this is not the case at all, it is how they are fed and exercised. The most important reason to neuter your male dog is to insure that he will have the best opportunity to lead a long, healthy life without the risk of diseases or complications related to the presence of the male hormone.

The operation to neuter a female pet is called **spaying** or the more descriptive term **ovariohysterectomy**. When a pet is spayed both ovaries as well as the uterus are removed. The reason the ovaries are also removed in pets is because they produce hormones that can lead to complications later in life. It is essential to spay your female pets because of these potential complications.

There is a great deal of misinformation pertaining to spaying. Some people say that a female should go through a heat cycle or even have a litter before they get spayed. This is absolutely false. The female should be spayed BEFORE her first heat or no later than before her second heat cycle because by doing so it will virtually eliminate the risk of breast cancer. Veterinary research showed that cats spayed before 6 months of age had a 91% reduction in their risk of breast cancer compared to intact cats, and cats spayed before one year had an 86% reduction. Dogs spayed before their first heat cycle have a 0.5% risk of developing breast cancer, if spayed between their first and second heat the risk is 8%. After the second heat cycle the risk of breast cancer development is 26%. Dogs spayed after two years of age have seven times the risk of developing breast cancer compared to dogs spayed before six months.

In addition, spaying eliminates the risk of ovarian and uterine cancer, heat cycles, as well as unwanted pregnancies. Unspayed females run the risk of developing uterine infections when they are in heat. This can be manifested by a severe and life-threatening condition called pyometra (the uterus fills with pus). Surgical intervention is required to save the pet's life but it is very risky due to the severity of the condition.

It is best to spay your female pet early in life; the risks of surgery are less when young and the development of complications from female hormone are reduced. Do not face the heartbreak of having a pet suffer from a condition that could have been avoided by having a simple procedure done safely early in life.

Although many people are reluctant to have their pets neutered or spayed for whatever reasons they have, however, by performing these procedures, we can eliminate many preventable disease conditions. In this way we can insure that the pets will live the longest and healthiest life possible.