

Feline Spay FAQ

THE PET HEALTH LIBRARY

By Wendy C. Brooks, DVM, DipABVP

Educational Director, *VeterinaryPartner.com*

Spaying your cat is an important part of basic cat health care. Spaying at a young age prevents mammary cancer and spaying at any age prevents unwanted kittens, noisy heat cycles, and possibly even urine marking in the house. The following is a list of frequently asked questions gleaned from years of veterinary practice as well as from answering questions online. We have found that even though the cat spay is a routine and a commonly performed procedure, many pet owners still have questions. Hopefully, this FAQ will be helpful.

Spaying is an ovariectomy, which means that both the ovaries and the uterus are removed. The cervix is tied off, leaving the vagina to end in a blind sac. Since it is the ovaries that are responsible for the heat cycles, possible mammary tumor development, and behavior problems, it is crucial that the ovaries be removed intact; some veterinarians will leave the uterus behind, though, it is generally regarded as best to remove the entire tract, uterus included.

Will spaying affect her personality?

The female cat spends at least half the year with her reproductive tract dormant (cats only cycle seasonally, primarily in the spring and summer). This means that, behaviorally speaking, she acts spayed most of the time and no personality change should be noted. This said, it is important to realize that a cycling cat can be extremely solicitous of affection. This kind of playful, flirtatious behavior will stop with spaying.

At what age can my cat be spayed?

The traditional age for spaying is six months. The last 20 years has brought us a great deal of research into "early" spaying and we now know that there is no problem with spaying as early as 8 weeks of age. Our hospital finds such tiny tissues difficult to manipulate and we like to spay our female patients when they weigh at least 3 1/2 to 4 pounds

Will she get fat and lazy after spaying?

Estrogens have a natural appetite suppressing effect and the loss of estrogens may lead to an increased appetite. Further, sterilization surgery has been shown to slow a cat's metabolism. Depending on the cat's age and activity level at the time of surgery, a diet change to a "lite" diet may be in order. Ask your vet if you are not sure.

Can she still come into heat after spaying?

Without ovaries, she should be unable to come into heat. Occasionally, a remnant of ovarian tissue is left behind by mistake. This can lead to some annoying behaviors as the female cat comes into heat (though she would be unable to get pregnant if her uterus has been removed as is customary with spaying). Special testing or even surgical exploration may be needed to determine if there is an ovarian remnant.

Neutering the Male Cat

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Neutering a male cat is an excellent step to help your young man grow into a loving, well adapted household citizen. The main reason to neuter a male cat is to reduce the incidence of objectionable behaviors that are normal in the feline world but unacceptable in the human world.

Roaming: More than 90% will reduce this behavior with neutering. Approximately 60% reduce this behavior right away

Fighting: More than 90% will reduce this behavior with neutering. Approximately 60% reduce this behavior right away

Urine marking: More than 90% will reduce this behavior with neutering. Approximately 80% reduce this behavior right away.

Another reason to neuter a male cat has to do with the physical appearance. Cats neutered prior to puberty (most cats are neutered at approximately age 6 months) do not develop secondary sex characteristics. These include a more muscular body, thickenings around the face called shields, and spines on the penis.

What is Done Exactly

The feline neuter is one of the simplest surgical procedures performed in all of veterinary medicine. The cat is fasted overnight so that anesthesia is given on an empty stomach. The scrotum is opened with a small incision and the testicles are brought out. The cords are either pulled free and tied to each other or a small suture is used to tie the cords and the testicle is cut free. The skin incision on the scrotum is small enough so as not to require stitches of any kind.

Early Neuter?

A common animal shelter practice has been to adopt a young kitten with the new owner paying a neuter deposit to be refunded when the kitten is neutered at the traditional age of six months. The problem has been that new owners do not return and young cats go unneutered. Early neutering allows for kittens to be neutered prior to adoption. There has been some controversy over this practice as it flies in the face of tradition but all research to date has shown no negative consequences to early neutering.

Some clinics support early neutering but prefer that kittens weigh at least 3 lbs so that the tissues are not too difficult to manipulate.