

Spaying Your Cat or Dog

What is a spay? What does the surgery involve?

Spaying your pet entails surgical removal of the reproductive organs. In females, these are the ovaries and uterus, and the procedure is called an ovariectomy, or spay. For routine spaying, the best age for dogs and cats is before puberty. Spaying is considered a routine abdominal operation. The procedure is done with the animal under general anesthesia and consists of a small incision in the abdomen for removal of the ovaries and uterus. Recovery is generally prompt. Most cats and dogs can go home the day after surgery and are back to normal within five to seven days.

What are the advantages of spaying?

- Spayed animals no longer feel the need to roam to look for a mate, they stay home and have less chance of being involved in traumatic accidents such as being hit by a car, lower incidence of contracting contagious diseases, and fewer dog fights.
- Dogs and cats spayed before their first heat (six months of age) are virtually assured of not developing mammary cancer, a relatively common disease in unspayed females.
- Spayed pets cannot develop the uterine infection called "pyometra," which occurs commonly among older, unspayed dogs and cats. Pyometra is a life threatening disease.
- Heat cycles: Spayed animals do not go through heat cycles or produce unwanted puppies or kittens. "Heat" refers to the time when female dogs and cats prepare for mating and pregnancy. Cats and dogs have their first heat at 5 to 12 months of age. In dogs, heat cycles occur approximately every six months. The external genitals swell, a bloody discharge occurs, and females attract males. Heat cycles generally last from 21 to 30 days and can be inconvenient. In cats, heat cycles can start at any time after sexual maturity, but most often occur in the spring and fall. Cats in heat do not usually have swelling or discharge, but they do attract tomcats. They exhibit unusually affectionate rubbing behavior, stretch and extend the back in a reverse arch, and meow loudly and continuously. This behavior may continue for days at a time over a period of weeks if mating does not take place.

Answers to Common Questions

- Spaying will NOT make your dog or cat fat and lazy unless she is overfed.
- It is NOT true that a cat or dog should have one litter before being spayed. This only leads to more unwanted puppies and kittens.
- Spaying will NOT change your pet's personality. Cats' personalities do not fully develop until about one year of age, and dogs' between one and two years. If your pet's personality changes after spaying at an early age, it would have changed without surgery.
- A small percentage of spayed dogs have trouble holding their urine when they reach old age. This can usually be controlled by medication.