



DOG TRAINING

Helping you and your dog become best friends for life.

SPAYING & NEUTERING

Why is spaying and neutering important?

Spaying and neutering is not only important from the perspective of pet overpopulation, but these procedures also have major health advantages for dogs and cats. Unlike humans, our pets do not go through life changes where their hormone levels decline and because of this they suffer from an increased risk in reproductive cancers as they age.

Does my dog have to have a heat cycle before she is spayed?

It is not necessary for dogs to experience a first heat before spaying. It is true that from a veterinarian's perspective the uterus is larger after a dog has been in heat and thus the procedure is made a bit easier, but in the long run the earlier you spay, the better for your pet.

At what age should an animal be spayed or neutered?

Typically, it is recommended that pets are spayed or neutered around four months of age. It used to be that veterinarians needed to wait for the animal to mature because the anesthetic was more difficult to eliminate from the system by the liver. With the development of new anesthetics, the procedures have become much safer for younger animals. Animal shelters now routinely spay and neuter puppies and kittens as early as six to eight weeks of age. The earlier an animal is spayed or neutered the more health and behavioral benefits will be realized.

For a female, if spayed before the first heat cycle, some studies show that the risk of developing breast cancer is decreased by up to fifty percent; the more time that passes before a female is spayed, the greater the risk that she will develop a reproductive cancer at later in life. Additionally, if an intact female has already developed breast cancer, if she is spayed at the same time that the lumps are removed, it will decrease the chances of the cancer returning.

It is a little different for male dogs. Testicular cancer is not as common in male animals as with humans but it does occur. Since when a dog is castrated we are removing the testes it nullifies any chance of the dog developing testicular cancer. We do see prostate cancer more frequently, and this type of cancer is not easily treated, particularly in this region. The rate of occurrence of these cancers increases at around six to eight years of age. With neutering we completely

eliminate the possibility of testicular cancer and greatly decrease the probability of a dog developing prostate cancer.

From a behavioral standpoint the earlier we neuter the better. When animals reach sexual maturity, if they are not neutered, they develop secondary sex characteristics as a result of the hormonal increase, which may then create behavioral problems. Some examples of these secondary sex characteristics are leg lifting, roaming, territoriality and marking. If a dog is neutered early these behaviors often do not develop. By putting off neutering, we reduce the possibility of eliminating these behaviors. Eighty-five percent of the times we can eliminate these behaviors by neutering an animal, but that still leaves fifteen percent for whom the behaviors will remain even after the production of the hormones has ceased.

Is it true that male dogs have less muscle development if they are neutered early?

There is some truth to this because muscle development is directly related to testosterone levels, but for the average dog the decrease in development would be barely perceptible. In some performance dog's people choose to wait until later to have them neutered. However, by waiting the dogs actually go through a hormonal change because we are removing testosterone from their systems, whereas when we neuter early, they never produce testosterone to begin with. Additionally, as previously mentioned, dogs are more likely to develop behavioral problems as a result of the development of secondary sex characteristics.

What is involved with a spay or neuter procedure?

A spay, or an ovariectomy, involves the removal of the ovaries and the uterus. The ovaries are where the eggs are located and are responsible for the production of the hormones estrogen and progesterone. The uterus is the region where fetuses develop. The animal is put under anesthesia and approximately a one-inch incision is made in the abdomen through which the organs are removed. Neutering, or male castration, requires an even smaller incision, through which the testes are removed and the arteries supplying the testes are ligated (tied off). This procedure is even simpler than the ovariectomy, and recovery time is very rapid. The animals quickly eliminate the anesthesia and they tend to recover with amazing speed. One of the nice things about animals is that they do not have an inner dialogue and simply focus on healing and getting well. Pain medications are used, however these procedures do not seem to disturb many animals.

What are Neuticles?

Neuticles are prosthetic testicles, which can be inserted so that it is difficult to tell that the animal has been castrated. These are very controversial due to the showing of altered animals. From the pet's standpoint they are unnecessary, as animals do not wallow in self-pity; rather they were developed for humans.

Will other animals act differently towards my pet?

Sexuality in animals and humans is very different. For animals it is a purely biological act that they typically are restricted from performing anyway, so it is not as though we are taking

something away from them. Occasionally, other household pets may attack the recently spayed or neutered animal immediately when they arrive home because of the hospital smells which make it more difficult for them to recognize the animal; however this is not because of the procedure itself.

Additionally, behaviors may change towards the spayed or neutered animals, but this is not because they have been altered but rather it is due to the lack of the development of secondary sex characteristics. Many of these behaviors are driven by the hormones and without the hormones do not develop. So for example, a dog may react differently to a neutered male, not because he knows he is neutered, but because he knows that he is not challenging the dog.

Are there any negatives to spaying and neutering?

Many people are concerned that their pet will get fat and lazy once they are neutered, but this is simply a myth. Calories are what make animals fat. While it is true that wandering and roaming decreases and to some degree the metabolic rate may slow down due to a decline in hormones and to these extents neutered pets may burn fewer calories, but this is easily combated by exercising your pet and feeding less.

There are also always risks of surgery; however these risks are extremely low. Any time an animal is placed under anesthesia there is a slight risk but with the new anesthetics these risks are minimal. Additionally, animals may be uncomfortable after the procedure, so they are routinely sent home with pain medication. It is often difficult to tell when an animal is in pain because they express it differently. Rarely do they vocalize or show pain, as these are signs of weakness and on an instinctual level to show weakness would be dangerous for them. We do know that they experience pain because of a rise in their cortisol levels and it is for this reason that we use pain medications.