

# Importance of Spay and Neuter



What, Why, When and How

Thank you for taking the moment to learn more about Spay and Neuter, the most talked about topic. It is also one the most debated topics among many. So, why is there so much confusion about it? We are going to address the importance of spay and neuter, debunk some old “wives tales”, and go over if sterilizing your pet is the right choice for you. There are a few things to consider before doing so, but it’s also important to remain educated on the topic and why it’s “preached” by many rescue organizations. In addition, we will provide resources on how to find a low cost spay and neuter!

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# What is Spay and Neuter

When someone is mentioning “spay and neuter”, they are referring to the sterilization of an animal. Sterilizing an animal is the process of removing the reproductive organs of an animal which is also known as castration or ovariectomy. These procedures can also be done for the human counterpart usually by choice or when they are going through complications like cysts or cancer. Both surgeries have been considered safe and effective.

## Spay

There are two procedures available when it comes to spaying a female dog which is the ovariectomy (removal of ovaries) and ovariohysterectomy (removal of ovaries and uterus). However, in the United States, veterinarians have always performed the latter to ensure there is no risk for the uterus to develop cancer or infection as a standard. With this in mind, this means more incisions, a longer process, and a heftier bill. Old habits die hard for some, but as of recent times, more veterinarians are starting to move towards the ovariectomy for a simpler process and easier accessibility for spay and neuter. But, how do we know which one is the right procedure? There is a lot to go over so let's start with the uterus.

## Uterus Cancer, Pyometra, and the Downside of Removing the Uterus

As per The National Canine Cancer Foundation: “Uterine tumors consist of 0.3 to 0.4 % of all canine tumors. Leiomyomas and leiomyosarcomas are most common accounting for approximately 90% and 10% respectively. There have also been reports of adenomas, adenocarcinoma, fibromas, fibrosarcomas and lipomas. Leiomyomas are generally benign tumors. They mostly affect middle aged to older animals. However, in an incidental finding a pup as young as 10 months was found to be affected with uterine carcinoma. No breed predilection has been reported so far.” Dr. Brian Evans from the Coastal Animal Hospital discusses that uterine cancer in dogs is 0.03% alone with 10% being malignant which means your chances of having a malignant uterine tumor is 0.003%. Most tumors are hormonally driven and with the ovaries alone removed, makes it very difficult to develop uterine cancer. Let's keep in mind that this doesn't just go for dogs either, as cats are in the same boat.

Another thing a female animal can get is something known as a pyometra which is an infection in the uterus and can be deadly. However, this infection is hormone driven meaning if there are no hormones, there is no infection. Leaving even a small piece of the ovary can help cause this infection though. If your female animal ever has a pyometra, it means that the ovaries were not completely removed.

So, we learned removing the uterus could eliminate the 0.03% of cancer but, what are the downsides? As we mentioned earlier, performing ovariohysterectomy (removal of ovaries and

uterus) is more extensive and a longer process. With this in mind, the procedure is doing a lot of tissue trauma and yanking at different areas to get the job done. It's more painful with longer recovery times, and can run the risk of not having a blood vessel not tied off appropriately. Consult your veterinarian about the procedure they are doing and which route you should take. For older females, ovariohysterectomy may be the best route. While younger dogs, ovariectomy is usually the recommended route.

## Neuter

Like females, males also have two procedures but only one is commonly performed. When neutering (castration) an animal, both testicles and their associated structures are removed. A vasectomy (severing the tubes, not recommended for cats, ever) is available but is rarely ever done. It's less invasive but still produces the hormones in the body. While it can prevent the breeding of an animal, this procedure is more for someone who has a sporting or show dog that needs the hormones for growth or strength. Kind of like a natural steroid. Neutering animals help them prevent developing testicular cancer, lower hormonal driven aggression, and are less likely to run from home in search of a mate (aka roaming).

## Why We Spay and Neuter

There are many reasons why we Spay and Neuter our pets, however, we all share a similar goal in the end; "Improving Overall Health". Let's go over some of the reasons why we spay and neuter.

### Improving Overall Health

Yes, spaying and neutering is far more beneficial than "our shelters are overfilling" discussion. Some people may feel that this topic is preached solely because shelters are overrun, and volunteers are exhausted (and they are!). However, there is much more to it than that. As we discussed previously, spaying and neutering can:

- Reduce risk of mammary cancer in females
- Reduce/eliminate risks of non-cancer prostate disease in males
- Eliminate risk of reproductive cancers in both males and females
- Eliminate risk of pyometra, a life-threatening uterine infection

Ask your veterinarian about pyometra and different reproductive cancers to learn more about them and the effects they have on your pet.

### Prevent or Lessen Unwanted Behaviors

Did you know an unsterilized animal can come with some unfavorable behaviors? One common thing heard when people are surrendering an animal aside for the notorious "I don't have time." is the, "He just keeps peeing everywhere even with training. I'm not sure why and/or I can't

afford a neuter.” Heads up beautiful people, if you don’t neuter your dog, expect them to mark on everything in your home especially if there are other animals.

Urine marking is a chemical communication where an animal (not just dogs or males) will urinate to communicate their territory, when they are feeling threatened or other things. The more anxious your animal may be, the more frequent they may mark in your home. Is it annoying? Absolutely. Is it an easy solution? Absolutely. Get your pets fixed. Don’t dump them because they only do what is natural to them.

Hormonal aggression also plays a huge part in an unsterilized animal, especially with two males. It’s a competition, a battle for mates, territory and resources. This isn’t saying all unsterilized animals are (more) aggressive. But, it is saying that you are leaving a door open for an animal to take a much more dramatic approach to something. Same for people, hormones can make us do crazy things or be a little cranky once in a while.

Many people seem to miss out on the fact that animals roam to seek mates. It’s a natural instinct! No matter what their rituals are, you can be sure it all boils down to the same idea. An unsterilized animal may be more likely to escape their home either it be by force or waiting for the perfect opportunity. Spaying and neutering your animals will help their urges to be a thing of the past.

### Reducing Overpopulation and Animal Suffering

Reducing overpopulation is one thing, but animal suffering? Sounds a little odd that not spaying and neutering your animal could cause suffering. However, in the long run, it’s true. Many of us are already aware that there is an overpopulation of animals in shelters, rescues, and roaming the streets. What many of us don’t know is that millions of these animals are euthanized because there are just not enough resources for them. As one animal comes in, three are taken out in bags. Many of these animals are because unsterilized animals are breeding on the streets, irresponsibly owners having “oops litters”, or backyard (unregistered) breeders are just dumping what they can’t sell. Worst of all, owners who are seeking to surrender their animals for legitimate reasons like being summoned for military duty or being ill - their animals are also being euthanized because of lack of resources. People who trust shelters to find their pets homes, only to learn that it was a one-stop road.

In addition, the overpopulation is causing so much stress and grief for the volunteers or other staff in the animal rescue world. Less people are volunteering in shelters because of how stressful and sad the situation is. Veterinarians and technicians are going through depression or other mental health struggles because they are tired of putting 100s of animals to sleep every day. We all want to know, “When will it stop?”. Imagine if the roles were reversed. The human race is so overpopulated, that people have to come in to euthanize children, the weak, the elderly or others just to make room for more. Now, perhaps I don’t have to tell you to “imagine” it as there was a time or two people were put in those positions. The grief and horror that came from those situations only for it to be watched from a different standpoint.

For those looking to get a better understanding of the situation, I highly urge you to volunteer at a shelter for a few days or a week. It doesn't have to be a kill-shelter but to learn and educate on the situation.

## When to Snip

There are a lot of factors to consider when it comes to timing your spay or neuter including their breed. Always consult your veterinarian on an appropriate time for your animal. By default, most animals get spayed:

- Around 4-6 months
- Are over 2 pounds
- At least 8 weeks old
- Are healthy enough for surgery anesthesia

Bigger breeds may be recommended to spay/neuter a little later as it takes a little longer to mature.

Wives Tale: Spay after the first heat cycle - but should you?

There have been many who say that a female dog should be spayed after she had her first heat cycle (think of a period). Their reasoning is that it comes with a lot of problems including heart tumors or adverse reactions to vaccines. Some even believe that a dog is not mature until they have their period (sound familiar?) and spaying them will prevent them from maturing. This isn't true by any means as a spayed (or neutered) animal will mature as nature intended for them to. There is not a whole lot backing up the theories and seem to stem from more breed specific data. We believe this idea came from the fact that hormones are like a natural steroid that helps promote growth and strength. While this is true, it doesn't prevent your dog from living a long healthy life and is more designed around sporting/show animals. A good rule of thumb is spaying at 5 months before a dog's first heat cycle to reduce the chances of mammary cancer. If you wait too long, there is a 26% chance of them getting mammary cancer by their second heat cycle.

Low Cost Spay and Neuter Database

[Low cost spay and neuter services | SpayUSA | Animal League](#)

Spaying and Neutering can be expensive, especially when they start charging \$500 per operation. Don't worry though, as the link above will help you find a much more affordable clinic.

## Snipped! Now What?

Congratulations for taking a huge step to prolonging your pet's life. Not only have you taken these steps for the health of your pet, but also to help reduce an ongoing problem in the shelter

system. You will receive instructions from your veterinarian on what to do during Post-Op. It's important to keep in mind of the following:

- Keep your pet safe and comfortable.
- Keep the animal inside and away from other animals during the recovery period.
- Don't let the animal be very active for up to 2 weeks after surgery, or as long as the vet advises.
- Ensure the animal is unable to lick their incision site by using a cone (popularly known as the "cone of shame") or other methods.
- Check the incision every day to make sure it's healing properly. If redness, swelling, discharge or a foul odor are present, contact your vet immediately.
- Don't bathe the animal for at least 10 days post-surgery.
- Call the vet if the dog is uncomfortable, is lethargic, is eating less, is vomiting or has diarrhea.

Once your pet has recovered from their surgery, you can enjoy your pet and live a fantastic life together. We wish you the best and thank you for making a great choice by taking the moment to learn more about spaying and neutering.

Sources:

CBHR Open Resource Library - Stautzenberger College - Spay and Neuter

[The National Canine Cancer Foundation | Together We Are The Cure](#)

[Should my dog have an ovariectomy or an ovariohysterectomy? And what's the difference? - Coastal Animal Hospital \(sdcoastalanimal.com\)](#)

[Laparoscopic Spays - Coastal Animal Hospital in Encinitas, CA \(sdcoastalanimal.com\)](#)

[Spaying and Neutering Dogs 101: The Procedure, Recovery and Costs | PetMD](#)