

# Spay and Neuter Saves Lives

## The importance of altering your pet

If you've ever been to a humane society or animal shelter before, you might have some idea of how big a problem pet overpopulation is. If you're lucky, you've visited well-run facilities with low euthanasia rates and happy pets; but odds are better that you've seen overcrowded pens and frazzled, overworked employees who face the hard task of making room for all of the animals being dropped off every day, often by sacrificing the animals already in their care. Every year, between 6 and 8 million pets are left at shelters across the United States; only half of them ever find homes. The good news is that you, as a pet owner, can help. You can save the lives of many unwanted puppies and kittens, and help your pet live a longer, healthier life, all by taking one simple action: spaying or neutering your pet.

### What are spay and neuter surgeries?

When you get your animal "fixed," you're actually getting one of two surgeries performed: if your pet is a girl, you're getting her spayed; if he's a boy, you're getting him neutered. Both surgeries are fast, simple, and virtually bloodless, and while any surgical procedure is stressful for an animal, the risks involved with spaying and neutering are so minimal as to be essentially nonexistent. The procedure is usually performed while the animal is still a baby; young animals recover much faster from surgery, and can avoid a number of health issues described below if they are fixed before they reach sexual maturity (in females, before they go into heat for the first time). The spay surgery involves the removal of the uterus and ovaries; the neuter surgery involves the removal of the testicles. If you've adopted your pet, most shelters require that it either be altered before it leaves the facility, or before it reaches four months of age. If you've bought or found your pet, try to get it fixed as soon as possible: as soon as a pet weighs over two pounds, it is big enough for surgery. If you decide to wait until your pet is a little older, keep in mind that a cat reaches sexual maturity as early as four months of age, and dogs around six months, so be sure to get the procedure done in a timely fashion.

### Why should I spay and neuter?

Aside from being a basic part of responsible pet ownership and an absolutely critical step in reducing pet overpopulation, both of these surgeries have some very significant health and behavior benefits.

### A spayed pet:

- ❖ Will never go into heat. Pets in heat, and particularly cats, can be insufferable – yowling, escaping, being overly protective of possessions – and on top of that, a pet in heat can be a messy affair. Cats and dogs are mammals too, and just like human women, they get periods. We'll let you fill in the details from there.
- ❖ Will never experience false pregnancies. A false pregnancy is the dog's body reacting after a heat cycle as though the dog is pregnant, manifesting in lactation, swollen mammarys, excessive nest-building, indiscriminate eating, and sometimes maternal guarding of possessions.
- ❖ Has less than a 1% chance of developing mammary tumors; females still intact at the age of five years have a more than 50% chance of developing mammary tumors.
- ❖ Will never have a uterine infection, a condition that can be life-threatening.
- ❖ Will never develop ovarian cysts, a common condition that can cause pain and bleeding, and may require surgery.
- ❖ Will never develop tumors of the ovaries or uterus.

### A neutered pet:

- ❖ Will be less aggressive towards other dogs, mates, and people. Testosterone fuels territorial aggression, and in 90% of cases an aggressive

dog's behavior will improve noticeably following neutering. Getting a dog neutered prior to sexual maturity almost always prevents the development of territorial behavior.

- 🐾 Will display fewer dominance issues.
- 🐾 Will be less likely, or in the case of male cats, unable, to mark territory with urine.
- 🐾 Will be less reactive.
- 🐾 Will be less inclined to escape or roam to find mates, and therefore less likely to end up in a shelter, be hit by a car, or get into a fight with another animal.
- 🐾 Will be less likely to engage in inappropriate humping.
- 🐾 Has a greatly reduced chance of suffering from an enlarged prostate. A minimal percentage of altered animals suffer from the disorder, whereas about 60% of intact males do.
- 🐾 Has a greatly reduced chance of suffering from prostate cancer and infections.
- 🐾 Has a greatly reduced chance of suffering from tumors of the testicles, penis, and anus.
- 🐾 Has a greatly reduced chance of suffering from perineal hernia – that is, a rupture of the abdominal wall.

As you can see, the benefits are many and varied, and there are some serious bullets that spaying or neutering will help your pet dodge. Mammary cancer, prostate cancer, infections, abnormal growths: all of these things can take years off a pet's life, and take thousands out of your bank account. The best thing you can do, for your pet, yourself, and every homeless pet that faces euthanasia, is to get your animals fixed.

### **But...**

In spite of the multitude of health benefits of spaying and neutering, there are a lot of reasons that people are reluctant to get their pets fixed. One of the most common is the desire to witness the "miracle of life," either on the part of the pet owner or on the part of the pet owner's children. It's easy to say "Oh, it's just one litter, what difference does it make," but this mindset is precisely the way that overpopulation is perpetuated. Your dog could have more than 8 puppies; are you prepared to keep them all? Are you prepared to find them good homes? Are you prepared to shoulder the extra medical and food

expenses that come with a pregnancy and a litter of puppies? Are you willing to put your dog's life at risk, and are you prepared to take all steps necessary should something go wrong? What if your dog has a prolapsed uterus or experiences some other internal trauma, and requires extensive surgery? What if she won't care for her puppies after they're born? Ultimately, if you have no intention of keeping and caring for a litter of puppies, the lesson you teach your children about the "miracle of life" is this: life is expendable, something to be sold and bought, or tossed away when it becomes too difficult or expensive. Even if you do find homes for all of the puppies, consider that by bringing those eight or more lives into the world, you're taking away eight or more homes for the millions of animals waiting in shelters and adoption centers for a second chance at life. If you or your family want to witness the miracle of life, why not foster a pregnant mother in the care of your local humane society, or take in a litter of kittens who lost their mother and need to be bottle-fed? There are millions of babies in need of a helping hand, and fostering is a great way to have the wonderful experience of helping those little miracles grow up.

People who own pure-bred pets are also often reticent to get them spayed or neutered. If you own a pure-bred dog and are thinking about breeding it, consider this: a full 25% of the animals that enter shelters every year are pure-bred. Having a litter of pure-bred puppies or kittens does not mean that you will be able to sell them all, or that they will all find decent homes, and more often than not the inbreeding inherent with pure blood lines will produce offspring with health problems or deformities. Breeding responsibly requires a great deal of forethought and planning, before, during, and after a pregnancy; do you have homes lined up for every new life before your dog gives birth? Have you checked references, called veterinarians, done home checks? Have you kept meticulous records on each adopter? Are you knowledgeable and experienced with healthy puppy or kitten nutrition and development? Do you have registration papers and medical records for each puppy or kitten? Are you prepared to care for any offspring who don't find homes right away? What if you still have puppies when they're six months old, do you have the space and the means to care for them? Being a responsible breeder means taking all the necessary steps to insure that the lives you bring

into the world do not end up abandoned or alone, and the decision to breed a pet, pure-bred or not, should never, ever be made lightly.

And finally, there's the "Dude Factor." Sometimes male owners who have male dogs either think that neutering would emasculate the dog, or they project their own dread of being "neutered" themselves onto their dog and say "I could never do that to him!" While your pet might be as good as human, you need to remember that he's *not* human. Pets don't have gender identities the way that people do; by neutering your dog you're not making him a sissy, making him fat and lazy, or sending him into an identity crisis. The fact of the matter is that he honestly could not care less whether he has those testicles or not. He won't spend a single second moping around, lamenting their departure. Don't think about how *you* would feel if you were in his position, because

you aren't; instead, think about the happy years you're adding to his life.

Although the decision can be a difficult one, if you turn to any veterinarian or animal care professional the advice will be the same: spaying and neutering is the way to go. And if cost seems like an insurmountable obstacle, it doesn't have to be. Take a moment to contact us at the Woodford Humane Society, or to contact your local adoption center, and you'll find that most organizations are well aware of the financial issues that come with pet ownership; low-cost spay and neuter programs like the one we maintain are common, and the benefit to your wallet and to your pet is invaluable. Remember, we have the exact same goal – to give a beloved pet the best life possible – and we're here to help you make that happen.

For more information on the Woodford Humane Society's low-cost spay/neuter program, or other local programs, please contact us. We can be reached by phone at 859.873.5491, or by email at [manager@woodfordhumane.org](mailto:manager@woodfordhumane.org).