

# Spay and Neuter Information

*Humane Society of the United States*

## What do "spay" and "neuter" really mean?

Female dogs and cats are spayed by removing their reproductive organs, and male dogs and cats are neutered by removing their testicles. In both cases the operation is performed while the pet is under anesthesia. Depending on your pet's age, size, and health, he or she will stay at your veterinarian's office for a few hours or a few days. Depending upon the procedure, your pet may need stitches removed after a few days. Your veterinarian can fully explain spay and neuter procedures to you and discuss with you the best age at which to sterilize your pet.

## Spaying or Neutering Is Good for Your Pet

- Spaying and neutering helps dogs and cats live longer, healthier lives.
- Spaying and neutering can eliminate or reduce the incidence of a number of health problems that can be very difficult or expensive to treat.
- Spaying eliminates the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancer and greatly reduces the incidence of breast cancer, particularly when your pet is spayed before her first estrous cycle.
- Neutering eliminates testicular cancer and decreases the incidence of prostate disease.

## Spaying or Neutering Is Good for You

- Spaying and neutering makes pets better, more affectionate companions.
- Neutering cats makes them less likely to spray and mark territory.
- Spaying a dog or cat eliminates her heat cycle. Estrus lasts an average of six to 12 days, often twice a year, in dogs and an average of six to seven days, three or more times a year, in cats. Females in heat can cry incessantly, show nervous behavior, and attract unwanted male animals.
- Unsterilized animals often exhibit more behavior and temperament problems than do those who have been spayed or neutered.
- Spaying and neutering can make pets less likely to bite.
- Neutering makes pets less likely to roam the neighborhood, run away, or get into fights.

## Spaying and Neutering Are Good for the Community

- Communities spend millions of dollars to control unwanted animals.
- Irresponsible breeding contributes to the problem of dog bites and attacks.
- Animal shelters are overburdened with surplus animals.
- Stray pets and homeless animals get into trash containers, defecate in public areas or on private lawns, and frighten or anger people who have no understanding of their misery or needs.
- Some stray animals also scare away or kill birds and wildlife.

Spay or neuter surgery carries a one-time cost that is relatively small when one considers its benefits. It's a small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of more unwanted animals.

As a nation, we claim to love cats and dogs. Millions of households have pets, and billions of dollars are spent yearly on pet supplies and food. But as a nation, we should take a hard, sobering look at a different annual statistic: the millions of dogs and cats given up to shelters or left to die on the streets. And the numbers tell only half the story.

Every cat or dog who dies as a result of pet overpopulation-whether humanely in a shelter or by injury, disease, or neglect-is an animal who, more often than not, would have made a wonderful companion, if given the chance. Tremendous as the problem of pet overpopulation is, it can be solved if each of us takes just one small step, starting with not allowing our animals to breed. Here's information about this crisis and why spaying and neutering is the first step to a solution.

Every day in the United States thousands upon thousands of puppies and kittens are born because of the uncontrolled breeding of pets. Add to that number the offspring of stray and abandoned companion animals, and the total becomes even more staggering. Every year, between six and eight million dogs and cats enter U.S. shelters; some three to four million of these animals are euthanized because there are not enough homes for them.

Too many companion animals competing for too few good homes is the most obvious consequence of uncontrolled breeding. However, there are other equally tragic problems that result from pet overpopulation: the transformation of some animal shelters into "warehouses," the acceptance of cruelty to animals as a way of life in our society, and the stress that caring shelter workers suffer when they are forced to euthanize one animal after another. Living creatures have become throwaway items to be cuddled when cute and abandoned when inconvenient. Such disregard for animal life pervades and erodes our culture.

Abandoned and stray companion animals who survive in the streets and alleys of cities and suburbs pose a health threat to humans and other animals. Homeless companion animals get into trash containers, defecate in public areas or on private lawns, and anger citizens who have no understanding of their misery or their needs. Some of these animals scare away or prey upon wildlife-such as birds-or frighten small children.

The public health epidemic of dog bites-which number more than 4.5 million each year-is due in part to uncontrolled breeding of pets. Bites by so-called dangerous dogs have drawn an enormous amount of media attention, and fatalities caused by dangerous dogs are a serious concern. Often, the vicious tendencies found in some dog breeds can be attributed to irresponsible breeding without regard for temperament. Neutering can help reduce this aggressive behavior.

Clearly, pet overpopulation is not just a problem for the animals or for the shelters involved. Each year communities are forced to spend millions of taxpayer dollars trying to cope with the consequences of this surplus of pets. These public costs include services such as investigating animal cruelty, humanely capturing stray animals, and sheltering lost and homeless animals.

The solution can be simply stated. Its implementation, however, requires sweeping efforts from a variety of organizations and people, including you.

*The solution is this:* Only by implementing widespread sterilization programs, only by spaying and neutering all companion animals, will we get a handle on pet overpopulation. Consider the fact that in six short years, one female dog and her offspring can give birth to 67,000 puppies. In seven years, one cat and her young can produce 420,000 kittens.

Given these high reproductive rates, it stands to reason that, in only a few years, carefully planned and implemented sterilization programs could produce a dramatic reduction in the number of unwanted companion animals born. In fact, in those towns and cities that have implemented such programs, we've already seen the number of companion animals who had to be euthanized decline by 30 to 60 percent-even in those communities where human populations have been steadily increasing. But these programs don't create themselves. They require the planning and coordination of many people. Successful pet population control programs range from subsidized sterilization clinics to cooperative efforts involving local veterinarians to mass media educational campaigns. Only through the continued nationwide establishment of such programs will we bring an end to the tragedy of pet overpopulation.

## Community-Based Solutions

Legislation can have the most direct impact simply by requiring that every pet adopted from a municipal or county shelter be sterilized within a certain period of time. Similarly, differential-licensing laws-laws that substantially increase license fees for pets who have not been spayed or neutered-give owners an incentive to sterilize their pets.

Education, too, is an essential part of solving this problem. Unless people know the facts about pet overpopulation and sterilization, they are virtually helpless to do anything about the problem. Reduced spay/neuter fees play an important role as well. Subsidized spay/neuter clinics and programs in some communities have already helped bring down the cost of sterilization. In areas where veterinarians have agreed to reduce their spay/neuter fees, we've seen a significant decline in the number of animals euthanized.

Finally, pet owners can do their part by having their companion animals spayed or neutered. This is the single most important step you can take. Have your pet sterilized so that he or she does not contribute to the pet overpopulation problem, and adopt your next pet from an animal shelter.