

# CAT Q&A



## **Why is it so important to spay or neuter my cat?**

Because it is the most effective way to stop animal overpopulation, which each year results in thousands of unwanted cats being handed into shelters or just abandoned. Unlike dogs, no official figures are available for the number of abandoned cats, but based on anecdotal evidence, it is believed there are significantly more abandoned cats than dogs, as well as numerous felines living in feral cat colonies.

## **What are the health benefits of spaying or neutering my cat?**

There is significant evidence that early spaying or neutering can have important benefits for the health of the individual animal. These include reducing the risk of certain cancers, having a positive benefit for health and lifespan, and curbing unwanted behaviour and marking.

## **What are the health benefits of spaying female cats?**

Unspayed cats are seven times more likely to develop mammary cancer than those spayed at puberty. Mammary cancer is the third most common form of neoplasm (abnormal tissue growth), though with a lower risk than in female dogs. 80% of feline mammary tumours are malignant. Neutering female cats also prevents pyometra (infection of the uterus), which though not common in cats, is not unheard of. Prevention of unwanted pregnancy/litters, eliminates the risk of dystocia (birthing difficulties). Spaying also eliminates or reduces the occurrence of certain unwanted feline behaviours.

## **Isn't it good for a female cat to have at least one litter of kittens?**

This was a widespread view in the past - one that was even shared by some vets - but this recommendation was based on opinion rather than hard fact. There is no evidence to suggest that allowing a cat to have a litter of kittens confers any health benefits. The best veterinary advice now is that in the vast majority of cases, spay/neuter is much the healthier option and should be the natural choice for owners.

## **What's wrong with allowing my cat to have kittens if I find homes for them?**

Many people think they are not contributing to the pet over-population problem, but in fact, this is not the case. Although the kittens they produce may go to good homes, they are taking up places that would otherwise have been available for an abandoned cat that ends up in an animal shelter.

## **What are the health benefits of neutering male cats?**

Neutering reduces fighting and unwanted territorial behaviour by over 80%, significantly reducing cat bite abscesses, as well as reducing the risk of FIV and Feline Leukaemia Viral Infection. Neutering also significantly reduces male urine marking behaviour.

## **When should I have my cat neutered or spayed?**

The latest advice is that in most cases spaying and neutering should be carried out at an earlier age than was previously suggested. In general, both male and female cats should be neutered/spayed at four months of age. While this is earlier than previously recommended, it is now the expert international recommendation, so please seek advice from your vet.

## **I have decided to have my cat neutered/spayed. What's the next step?**

The above answers are guidelines only. Your vet will assess your cat and help you to weigh up the benefits of spaying or neutering in relation to your pet's individual health and circumstances.

# DOG Q&A



## Why is it so important to spay or neuter my dog?

Because it is the most effective way to stop dog overpopulation, which each year results in thousands of unwanted dogs being abandoned or handed into shelters around the country.

## What are the health benefits of spaying or neutering my dog?

There is significant evidence that early spaying or neutering can have important benefits for the health of your individual pet. These include reducing the risk of certain cancers, having a positive benefit for health and lifespan, and curbing unwanted behaviour and marking.

## What are the health benefits of spaying female dogs?

Spaying dramatically reduces the risk of mammary cancer - the risk of a non-neutered female dog developing mammary tumours during her life drops from 70% to 0.5% if neutered before her first heat. Neutering removes the risk of uterine, cervical and ovarian tumours. Spaying also eliminates the risk of other potentially serious conditions such as perianal fistulas (affecting the anal area), dystocia (birthing difficulties) and pyometra (infection of the uterus), which occurs in 23% of non-neutered female and kills approximately 1% of them. It also avoids physiological and behavioural changes associated with the female dog's reproductive cycle.

## Isn't it good for a female dog to have at least one litter of pups?

This was a widespread view in the past - one even shared by some vets - but this recommendation was based on opinion rather than hard fact. There is no evidence to suggest that allowing a female dog to have a litter of puppies confers any health benefits. The best veterinary advice now is that in the vast majority of cases, spaying or neutering is a much healthier option and should be the natural choice for dog owners.

## What's wrong with allowing my dog to have puppies if I find homes for them?

Many people think they are not contributing to the pet over-population problem if they do this, but in fact, this is not the case. Although the puppies they produce may go to good homes, they are taking up places that would otherwise have been available for an abandoned dog that ends up in a shelter.

## What are the health benefits of neutering male dogs?

Neutering eliminates the risk of testicular cancer, the second most prevalent cancer among male dogs. It dramatically reduces the incidence of other non-cancerous conditions of the mature prostate and the risk of certain tumours. It may possibly reduce the risk of diabetes. Neutering can also reduce unwelcome behaviours such as aggression and dominance, sibling rivalry, territorial marking with urine, roaming/straying and dry-humping.

## When should I have my dog spayed or neutered?

The latest advice is that in most cases spaying and neutering should be carried out at an earlier age than was previously suggested. In general, both male and female small dogs should be neutered or spayed at five to six months of age - that is, before a female dog's first season/heat. However, current advice is that large breed dogs (both male and female) should be spayed or neutered at approximately nine months of age, while giant breed dogs (both male and female) should have this delayed until at least one year of age. This is to allow large and giant breed dogs be more skeletally mature before neutering and may help to reduce the likelihood of osteosarcoma in these breeds.

All females should have a pre-op check prior to spaying. It is not recommended to spay females when in season or while they are lactating. Ideally, if a female has had a season, spaying should be performed ten to twelve weeks after the end of her last season. Spaying may also be delayed by some medical issues. Please seek advice from your vet.

## I have decided to have my pet neutered/spayed. What's the next step?

Talk to your vet. The above answers are guidelines only. Your vet will assess your dog and help you to weigh up the benefits of spaying or neutering in relation to your pet's individual health and circumstances.