

## This Month: Sterilization

### Reproduction

Now that spring is here and this summer's crop of puppies are maturing into full-grown adult dogs, its time to start thinking of their future. No, we don't mean college; we mean their hormones, instincts, and reproduction. Because once their hormones kick in and instincts take over, they are really going to want to reproduce! But what should you know about reproduction in your pets, and what can you do with that information?

Dogs sexually mature between five and ten months of age, coming into their first heat around that time. Many of last summer's puppies will just be maturing, and the longer hours of light (photoperiod) in the spring will induce them into their first heat. Smaller dogs can come into their first heat between five and seven months, while larger dogs will often take longer, waiting until they are closer to eight or ten months to come into their first heat. If a dog is nearing this age as spring comes you may want to consider neutering before the season takes your pup's hormones unawares. Pups that are still too young to come into their first heat during spring's longer sunlight hours will usually then start later in the year, despite the photoperiod. Dogs only go into heat once or twice a year, signaling that they are coming into their pro-estrus time by spotting and bleeding. During this time they cannot get pregnant, but may attract male dogs who will want to stay around and wait for them to come into heat. Once in heat, female dogs are usually only fertile for three to ten days, but they can stay in heat for up to 21 days during their first heat and will need to be kept inside away from stray male dogs for the entire estrus period. For the three to ten days of "pro-estrus" time they will be spotting and need to be kept either in carpet-less (and furniture-less) rooms, or kept in "doggy diapers". There are special dog diapers that you can buy at pet stores, or you can improvise your own by cutting a tail hole out of a human diaper (this works the best on dogs that have tails that naturally curve upwards).

Cats are a bit different than dogs when it comes to being "in heat". They will come into their first heat at a fairly consistent six months of age, regardless of photoperiod. Cats are polyestrus, meaning they can have many heats per breeding season, usually lasting between 5-14 days each and will stay in this continuous heat cycle until they are either bred or spayed. Female cats in heat will be restless, whining and trying to get outdoors at every opportunity. They do not spot, but will need to be kept indoors away from stray feral males while in heat. Cats are also what are called "induced ovulators", meaning they will not ovulate until they have mated. They share this trait with camels, ferrets, rabbits, minks, skunks, ground squirrels, llamas, short-tailed shrews and giant fruit bats.

## Neutering

Neutering is the process of removing the reproductive organs of an animal. In females, this includes the ovaries, fallopian tubes and uterus, while in males it is only the testes that are removed. Both procedures require the use of anesthetics, and recent advances in the animal medical field have provided veterinarians with safe anesthetics that can be used on animals as young as eight weeks of age. “Spays” and “neuters” are the most common surgeries that veterinarians perform.

While it might seem a little unnecessary to completely remove these organs in the pets, most owners find it not only easier, but also see more benefits than just the fact that their animal can no longer reproduce. Just removing the ovaries of a female dog or cat may work, but many times when the ovaries are the only organ removed they can grow back from small nodule ovaries that are on the fallopian tubes. And while “tying the tubes” works for both male and female dogs and cats, you do not get any of the health or behavioral benefits that you would when completely removing the organs (and with them the hormones and urges to mate).

The truth is that fully spaying and neutering your pets can lengthen their life by 1-3 years in dogs and 3-5 years in cats. Many cancers are prevented in animals that are neutered, including uterine, ovarian and testicular cancers. Without the tissues to be infected, the chance of getting such a disease (while not high in unaltered animals) becomes nil in a neutered dog or cat. Hormone-driven diseases like benign prostatic hypertrophy are also prevented in neutered animals.

Spaying females before their first heat increases the chance of keeping them healthier longer. Female cats that are not spayed before their first heat are seven times more likely to develop mammary tumors, and those that are never spayed are prone to developing pyometra (a common uterine infection). If your female cat goes into heat and you do not want to breed her, it is recommended that you spay her as soon as possible to prevent a dangerous anemia from occurring. Female dogs on the other hand have a higher risk of hemorrhaging during surgeries while they are in heat, so it is recommended that you wait at least three weeks until they are out of their heat cycle to spay them. Female dogs also have a higher risk of depression if spayed during heat due to the sudden lack of estrogen in their system.

Spaying a female pet will completely stop the heat cycle, causing the animal to lose their libido and reducing their urge to roam and look for a mate. Neutering a male pet will not only reduce the urge to roam and mate, but it also reduces the urge to mount other animals (and legs!) and mark their territory by spraying. Pets will stay protective of their territory, and most will become calmer (if not less aggressive) after a neuter surgery.

Reducing the urge to roam for a mate in both male and female pets will keep them safer from fights, injuries, poison (car fluids smell and taste very sweet and are very attractive to roaming dogs), accidents, disease, and hit-by-cars. In fact, 85% of dogs that are hit by cars in the US are unaltered. Tomcats that are unaltered are likely to become a nuisance in a neighborhood by killing birds and other wildlife, getting into fights with pets, spreading diseases (like FeLV and Rabies), marking territory with urine, defecating in yards, and developing nasty looking abscesses and infections. Pets that *are* spayed and neutered are more likely to get along at home, as well as outside of the home in places such as dog parks and veterinarian offices.

## Neutering at the FRAH

- The cost of a neuter or spay depends on the size of the animal, weight being the determining factor for the cost of sedation.
- Pets get a shot of pain medication that will last for 24 hours when they are neutered. Afterwards, pain medication is sent home with the owner to alleviate any symptoms post-surgery.
- Bloodwork is done before the surgery to insure that the pet is healthy and ready to go under anesthesia. If the bloodwork shows any signs of illness, your surgery may be rescheduled and your pet given antibiotics.
- Stitches are removed 7-10 days after the surgery. Only male cats have dissolvable stitches – all others need to be removed.

## Neutering myths

- Pets do not get overweight because they have been neutered. Pets get overweight because they are being fed too many calories for their size and lifestyle.
- The “miracle of life” is a poor reason to have a litter of puppies or kittens. Teaching children the importance of properly taking care of their pets is a much better lesson. (Most litters are born in dark seclusion anyways)
- Animals mate because of hormones and instincts, not because they are “in love”. They do not suffer from an identity crisis when neutered because they have no sexual identity or ego to begin with.

There are risks to neutering, as there are with all surgical procedures. Most commonly to mind are the risks of anesthesia on the animal. While in years past, anesthesia complications were a big risk in veterinary medicine, today’s anesthetics have been proven safe on animals as young as seven weeks of age. Blood work is often done beforehand to make sure the animal is safe to put under anesthesia, and all animals are monitored during surgery by an experienced technician.

Urinary incontinence in spayed female dogs can be a concern, but it is not common and can be easily treated by your veterinarian. There is a slightly higher risk of prostate cancer in neutered male dogs, but it is not common in either altered or unaltered animals. Hormone-responsive hair loss can be a concern in dogs, but can be treated with hormone supplements; and minor personality changes can sometimes occur, although they are usually for the better (pets generally become calmer after the surgery). Male cats are at a higher risk of urethral obstruction, causing blockages and urinary tract infections, but any overweight male cats are at risk, whether or not they have been altered.

## Neuticles

Do you want to get your male pet neutered but are worried about the effect it will have on his “doghood”? Worry not! Neuticles Testicular Implants for Pets has the solution to your problem – silicon testicle implants. Made from 100% safe solid silicon, Neuticles can be implanted into any pet during the neuter surgery, and has been successfully performed on pets up to 5 years after their neuter surgery. Neuticles come in three different types and enough sizes to fit any dog, cat, horse or bull. Since 1995, Neuticles have been used in veterinary medicine without a single complication, and they replicate the former testicles in size, shape, feel and weight. Your pet will retain his natural look, unaware that he has been altered in any way.

### Success Story: Spay Day!

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Spay Day USA was held on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006, but the vet clinics of the Lowcountry are still helping to spay and neuter pets of low-income families through the entire month of March!

National Spay Day was put into effect in 1995 by the Doris Day Foundation. It offers people who otherwise may not be able to afford this surgery a chance to spay or neuter their pets, and as a result also helps to limit the number of puppies and kittens that are born accidentally each year.

Twelve veterinary clinics in the Charleston area have donated over 250 neuters and spays for cats and dogs, and Humane Net has donated money for at least one hundred more surgeries on top of that. Dr. Sheridan is doing his part in this admirable program by donating the second highest number of spays and neuters for both dogs and cats.

### Dates, Upcoming News, Specials:

March is Adopt a Rescued Guinea Pig month!

With the warmer weather the FRAH is getting busy again! Be sure to schedule your appointments well in advance to insure you get the best time possible.

Want to get a head start on this year's flea season? Keeping your pet on Frontline or Revolution throughout the winter months will insure that they will be flea-free come next spring! Doing the same for heartworm prevention will insure that your favorite furry friend is heartworm negative all year long too!

Did you miss last month's newsletter? Don't worry! The FRAH Newsletter is now on the web!  
[www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm](http://www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm)

### Puppies for sale!

Two FRAH breeders have puppies for sale!

Boxer Puppies, AKC papers, won't be available for adoption until 8 weeks old; call the FRAH for more info.

Bull Mastiff Puppies, 12 weeks old; call the FRAH for more info.