

Desexing your cat

Why should I have my cat desexed?

Desexing is very beneficial to the health of your cat, especially if performed at an early age. Following puberty, which occurs at approximately eight to nine months of age, the male cat often develops a number of undesirable behavioural changes. He will become territorial and start to mark areas, even inside the house, by spraying urine. This urine has a particularly offensive odour and is difficult to remove. As the tomcat reaches sexual maturity, he will start to enlarge his territory, straying ever farther from the house, particularly at night. Many of the cats that are hit by cars on the road are non-desexed males. By increasing the size of his territory, he increases the likelihood that he will come into contact with other cats and will get into fights for territorial dominance. Fight wounds can result in severe infections and abscesses. Diseases such as FIV and FeLV, which can cause AIDS-like syndromes and cancers in cats, are also spread through cat bites. Last, but not least, neutering prevents unwanted litters and the needless deaths of tens of millions kittens and cats each year.

The longer a tomcat sprays and fights, the less likely it is that neutering will stop these behaviours.

The most obvious benefit of desexing your female cat is the prevention of unplanned pregnancies. There is no medical or scientific benefit in letting your cat have a litter before she is spayed. Once a cat reaches puberty, usually at around seven months of age, she will have a heat or oestrus cycle every two to three weeks for most of the year, unless she becomes pregnant. She will be "in heat" or receptive to mating for approximately one week in each cycle. During "heat" she may display unsociable behaviour such as loud and persistent crying and frequent rubbing and rolling on the floor. This behaviour coupled with her scent, will attract male cats around. Spaying will stop her oestrus cycles and eliminate the risk of ovarian and uterine cancers later in life.

Mammary (breast) cancer is the number one type of cancer diagnosed in un-spayed female cats. If your cat is spayed before her first heat cycle, there is less than 0.5% chance of developing this cancer. With every subsequent heat cycle, the risk of developing cancer increases. After 2½ years of age spaying gives no protective benefit against developing cancer. Pets with diabetes or epilepsy should be spayed to prevent hormonal changes that may interfere with medications.

When should I have my cat desexed?

It is recommended to desex your cat before the onset of puberty. Puberty normally begins between six and ten months of age. We recommend desexing at around five months of age, although it is possible to perform this procedure at an earlier age if required.

What happens when my cat comes in for the procedure?

Your cat will be examined by the vet while you are present and given a sedative injection so that they are not anxious. You will have the opportunity to ask the vet questions and discuss any other concerns.

What does the procedure involve?

Your cat will have a general anaesthetic. You will need to withhold food for 12 hours prior to surgery. However, your cat can have free access to water.

In male cats, both of the testicles are removed through a small incision in the scrotum. Since the incisions are very small and since stitches may cause irritation of the sensitive skin of the scrotum, it is rare for the incisions to be sutured.

Spaying a female cat involves removal of the uterus and both ovaries through a small incision made in the midline of the abdomen, just below the umbilicus. The surgical incision is closed with several layers of sutures. We use intra-dermal dissolving sutures which mean that there are no stitches visible in the skin. This means that in almost all cases there is no need for an Elizabethan collar to be worn by your cat and no need for a second visit for suture removal.

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Are there any post-operative precautions I should take?

Restriction of excessive activity is the primary consideration for post-operative care. Most cats can resume normal activity a few days after surgery. Until then, not too much running, jumping or climbing is advised.

When can my cat go home?

Both male and female cats are sent home later on the same day of surgery.

What adverse effects might desexing have on my cat?

In the vast majority of cases no adverse effects are noted following desexing. In certain cats, notably the Siamese breed, the hair that grows back over an operation site may be noticeably darker, believed to be due to a difference in the skin temperature. This darker patch may grow out with the following moult as the hair is naturally replaced.