



THE INTERNATIONAL CAT ASSOCIATION, INC.

EARLY SPAY & NEUTER: PROS AND CONS



An informative look at the pros and cons of early spay or neuter.

A Brief Look at Early Spay and Neuter

The concept of early spaying and neutering (before the animal is sexually mature) is not a new one. The philosophy of early spaying and neutering of pets has been practiced for over 50 years in North America. It was not until much later that questions and concerns were raised about the possibility of negative side effects in practicing this procedure.

- Concerns were that the animal may suffer from long-term effects such as: stunted growth, a higher tendency to obesity, a lack of desire to be active or an undesirable behavior pattern. It was believed that waiting until a pet was older increased the safety of surgery. In addition, there were concerns that early altering would increase the incidence of feline lower urinary tract disease.

These concerns have been tested and researched, thoroughly, by many different universities and have resulted in some findings that are worth studying and understanding, before making any conclusions on when to spay or neuter your pet.

University Study Conducted on the Benefits or Drawbacks of Early Spay or Neuter

Studies conducted on the benefits or drawbacks of early spaying or neutering were done by the University of Florida. These studies were funded by The Winn Feline Foundation, in conjunction with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). These extensive studies were monitored very seriously and concluded that the spaying or neutering of an animal, before it has reached sexual maturity, has no known ill side effects. On the contrary, research has found that early spaying or neutering of your pet can aid in the recovery process, giving your pet a speedy and virtually painless recovery. Years ago, when safe pediatric anesthetic techniques were not available, waiting until a patient was older increased the safety of surgery. Altering no longer needs to be delayed for this reason. These studies were conducted on animals ranging from 7 weeks old to 12 months old. Those 7 weeks old did not react any differently than those who were 12 months old.

- *Results from the studies performed in Florida were as follows:*
 - Growth may be prolonged if the procedure is performed prior to sexual maturity or the animal's first heat. This can be a benefit for the pet owner who has an unusually small pet and would like for it to become a little larger.
 - Observations of urinary tract development showed no differences between those altered early and those altered post 7 months (other than the differences related to sex). The investigators measured the diameter of the urethra in the male kittens and found no differences between the groups.
 - Contrary to popular belief, the neutered group of animals was just as active as their unaltered counterparts.
 - Spaying a female can actually protect her against mammary cancer and uterine infections. In males, neutering reduces the risk of testicular cancer and enlargement of the prostate and related infections.
 - From a pet owner's point of view, the altered pet is a much better companion than their unaltered counterparts. They have a tendency to be less aggressive and more affectionate. And, since they are not motivated by the urge to reproduce, they are less prone to roam and fight.



Why Advocate Early Spay & Neuter?

There are obvious reasons to spay or neuter your pet as soon as possible. These reasons are both for the welfare of the general animal population and for your own pet's health.

- Pet population control is a growing concern. By spaying or neutering your pet, you can help contribute to reducing this problem. Responsible pet owners can and should make a collective effort to insure that all pets are neutered, thus preventing any further increases in unwanted pets.
 - Susan Dixon, DVM who fully endorses early altering and has done hundreds of baby kittens, says, "The surgery is EASY and the kittens heal so fast".
- A Healthy Pet is a happy pet, and the earlier they are spayed or neutered the less likely they are to remember the procedure and the more likely they are to have a speedy recovery.
- Ask your veterinarian about concerns you may have on early spay/neuter.

Further Reading for You or Your Veterinarian:

1. Aronsohn MG, Faggella AM. Surgical techniques for neutering 6-14-week-old kittens. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(1);53- 55, 1993.
2. Chalifoux A, Niemi G, Fanjoy P, Pukay B. Early spay- neutering of dogs and cats (letter). *Canadian Veterinary Journal* Vol 22; 381, 1981.
3. Faggella AM, Aronsohn MG. Anesthetic techniques for neutering 6- to-14-week-old kittens. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(1);56-62, 1993.
4. Hosgood G. Anesthesia and surgical considerations in Hoskins JD (ed) *Veterinary Pediatrics - dogs and from birth to six months*, Philadelphia, WB Co., p. 561, 1995.
5. Land TW Favors Early Spay/Neuter. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc.* Vol 216 (5) 659-60 2000.
6. Lieberman LL. Advantages of early spaying and neutering (letter). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 181(5);420, 1982.
7. Lieberman LL. A case for neutering pups and kittens at two months of age. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 191(5);518-521, 1987.
8. Root MV, Johnston SD, Johnston GR, Olson PN. The effect of pre-pubertal and post-pubertal gonadectomy on penile extrusion and urethral diameter in the domestic cat. *Veterinary Radiology & Ultrasound* Vol 37(5);363-366, 1996.
9. Stubbs WP, Bloomberg MS. Implications of early neutering in the dog and cat. *Seminars in Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (Small Animal)* Vol 10(1);8-12, 1995.
10. Stubbs WP, Salmeri KR, Bloomberg MS. Early neutering of the dog and cat in Bonagura JD, Kirk RW (eds) *Kirk's Current Veterinary Therapy XII Small Animal Practice*, Philadelphia, WB Saunders Co., p. 1037, 1995.
11. Theran P. Early-age neutering of dogs and cats *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(6);914-917, 1993.

©1998 updated 2001 Brigitte McMinn - TICA Feline Welfare Committee