

## The Kindest Cut

# Spaying and Neutering Save Lives

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) estimates that between 6 and 8 million pets enter animal shelters each year. Of these pets, the HSUS believes that at least half—3 to 4 million—are euthanized, or “put to sleep.” That’s a heartbreaking statistic, especially because many of these animals are young and healthy.

Every day in the United States, thousands more puppies and kittens are born than are human babies. That means that there will never, ever be enough homes for all the dogs and cats that are born each year until more people realize the importance of spaying and neutering their pets.

### What Are Spaying and Neutering?

Spaying and neutering are surgical procedures used to remove the reproductive organs of dogs and cats. *Spaying* is the removal of the uterus and ovaries of a female dog or cat. *Neutering* is the removal of a male dog’s or cat’s testicles.



Spaying and neutering can help reduce pet overpopulation so that more puppies and kittens find good homes.

Both of these procedures are performed by a veterinarian while the pet is under anesthesia. These procedures are also sometimes referred to as “sterilizing” or “fixing” pets. Pets can be spayed or neutered when they are as young as 8 weeks of age, and many animal shelters now follow this policy before releasing pets

### The Miracle of Life

Many people say they want their children to experience the “miracle of birth.” Is there any harm in letting a pet have just one litter? The answer is a resounding “Yes!” Each year, millions of unwanted pets need homes. Even if you think you could find homes for all the puppies or kittens in your pet’s litter, that simply means that there are fewer homes available for pets already waiting for adoption. In addition, if any of your pet’s offspring are left unspayed or unneutered, the number of puppies or kit-

tens produced from your single litter can grow rapidly. In just a few years’ time, a single pair of unsterilized dogs can be responsible for dozens and even hundreds of puppies. A single pair of unsterilized cats can be responsible for the birth of thousands of unwanted kittens.

The best lesson children can learn is the “miracle of life”—by making sure as many pets as possible find homes and avoid euthanasia.

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for adoption. Otherwise, sterilization is typically recommended for pets before they reach sexual maturity at about 5 months.

### Why Spay or Neuter a Pet?

Aside from helping to reduce pet overpopulation, there are many reasons why it makes sense to prevent your pet from having puppies or kittens. First, there are health benefits for your pet:

- Spaying and neutering help pets live longer, healthier lives.
- Spaying and neutering greatly reduce the chance of your pet getting a number of serious health problems that can be life-threatening and expensive to treat, such as uterine and testicular cancer.

Second, “fixing” your pet has many benefits for you:

- Spayed and neutered pets are less likely to try to escape and roam. Roaming pets are far more likely to get into fights with other animals or to experience traumatic injuries, such as being hit by a car.
- Neutering male cats makes them less likely to mark their territory (your home) by spraying urine.
- Spaying female pets prevents them from coming into heat. Pets in heat may vocalize more and may leave bloodstains on carpets or furniture. A female dog or cat in heat may also attract unwanted male canine or feline visitors to your property.
- Spayed or neutered pets are generally more even tempered and less likely to show aggression with other animals.

### Is There Any Risk to My Pet?

All medical procedures have some risks, but with today’s safer anesthetic agents, preoperative testing, and routine use of postoperative pain control, most pets generally handle the surgery very well. Be sure to follow instructions regarding withholding food and water before surgery. Your pet will need to stay at your veterinarian’s office anywhere from a few hours to a few days, depending on the age, size, sex, and condition of your pet. Also be

careful to follow recommendations regarding any home care or aftercare, such as cage rest and appointments for suture removal.

Any pet that isn’t intended for a responsible breeding program should be spayed or neutered before it reaches sexual maturity.

### Will My Pet Gain Weight?

You can help keep your pet from gaining unnecessary weight by not overfeeding or overindulging him or her with treats and by making sure he or she gets plenty of exercise. Regular walks for dogs and regular playtimes for cats can help keep your friend fit.

### Weighing the Costs

Spaying or neutering is a one-time investment in the health of your pet. If you think the expense of “fixing” your pet is costly, compare it to the expense of caring for a pregnant and nursing mother, raising a litter of puppies or kittens (including the necessary vaccinations and deworming medications), and feeding puppies or kittens until they are old

Ask whether you should separate male and female puppies or kittens from each other—or from other unsterilized pets of the opposite sex—to avoid unwanted pregnancies before they are spayed or neutered.

enough to be placed in homes. Also consider that spayed and neutered pets are less likely to roam, suffer accidents, or develop certain serious diseases.

Talk to us about the reasons why it makes sense to spay or neuter your pet. If you have questions, we’d be happy to answer them.