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Neutering your pet recommended

Y2SPAY? Good question. It's a question veterinarians get virtually every day. And the answer is one that every humane organization in the country as well as the American Veterinary Medical Association agree on. We would all encourage you to spay your female pet and neuter your male pet. There are numerous good reasons to do so.

First, neutering (this is the correct, general term that applies to both males and females, actually) reduces the risk of certain cancers later in life. Specifically, it reduces the risk of mammary cancer in females.

Second, it helps reduce territorial and aggressive behaviors in males. While not a panacea for all dog-vs.-dog aggression, it is a fundamental step that reduces territorial tendencies and the risk of injury that dog fights can inflict.

Third, if "Rover" lives up to his name and likes to wander away when off-leash, then being neutered will lower his drive to drift. And this reduces the likelihood that he will be hit by a car, or otherwise get lost.

What about the argument that you may want your children to have the experience of seeing and raising a litter of puppies or kittens?

I won't argue that this is a neat experience. However, part and parcel of that experience is the reality that 15 million or more dogs and cats are euthanized every year at humane society shelters because there aren't enough homes for them.

Even if you can find homes for your litter (not a guarantee by any means), that will reduce the available homes for the dogs and cats already in shelters. So my answer to the desire to have your children see the miracle of birth is that this is fine provided you also go with them to the humane society shelter and show them how puppies and kittens are put to sleep every day. Don't mislead them about the responsibility you will bear when your pets reproduce.

For most dogs and cats, getting neutered entails spending a day at a veterinary hospital (perhaps commiserating with their buddies who are there for like reasons?). As with any of us that report for routine surgery, a simple set of blood tests is usually performed to determine that internal organ function is normal in preparation for anesthesia.

Once the tests are completed and a physical examination has been done, a pet is anesthetized and the fur at the surgery area is clipped and the skin is scrubbed with antiseptic soap prior to beginning the surgery.

Before surgery is completed, dogs and cats are given an injection of a painkiller, and following surgery they are often sent home with painkillers for several days.

Most dogs and cats are tired for the first few days after surgery, although some seem to bounce back in a day. In any case, it is recommended that for about 10 days post-op they have their activity restricted to let the incision heal, before being allowed to run and play again.

Unless a purebred dog or cat is intended specifically for breeding purposes, and is owned by

someone experienced in raising a litter of little ones (including managing the constant crying, messing, and potential trouble-making that a group of 5 to 10 "toddlers" can cause), I suggest making life easy on yourself and your pet. Have them neutered according to your veterinarian's recommendation, usually between 4 and 6 months of age.

Your pet will be more relaxed and happier to stay at home instead of wandering, and you will have a better mannered companion for life.

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