

DESEXING YOUR PET

PET CARE TIPS

Desexing is important for future health, improved behaviour and for population control (reducing unwanted pets in refuges). This is a surgical procedure that renders an animal unable to breed. The procedure for a female is called a Spey and for a male is called castration. These procedures are done under a general anaesthetic and using strict hygiene controls.

Desexing is best done between the ages of four and six months of age. At this age, the organs are relatively smaller than later in life. Therefore, it is safer; they are anaesthetised for less time and there is less risk of complications occurring with the surgery. Your puppy will wake up faster and recover quicker. Additionally, the long-term health benefits achieved are greatest when desexing is performed before sexual maturity.

Desexing Female Pets

A Spey involves removal of both ovaries and the uterus. This involves intra-abdominal surgery. The ovaries produce eggs during the heat cycle and the female hormones oestrogen and progesterone. The uterus is removed to avoid possible infection later in life.

There are no physical or behavioural advantages for your pet in having a season or a litter before being desexed.

The Benefits:

- Spaying before the first season reduces the chance of mammary (breast) cancers developing later in life by over 99%. (the most common cancer in entire female dogs)
- No lock up period is required during seasons; twice a year for up to 3-4 weeks.
- No hormonal surges (often seen when in season or after a litter) causing irritability and unpredictability
- Avoids potentially life-threatening conditions such as Pyometra (Pus-filled uterus; often seen a few weeks after a season, and at any age)
- No health risks due to unplanned pregnancies
- No caesarean procedures for females having difficulty with a litter; often required for small breeds, those with large heads (esp. Staffies) and first litters. Have a spare \$1000-2500 on hand when your pet is expecting
- Reduced tendency towards aggression, especially with children
- Less desire to wander; less likely to be involved in traffic accidents and fights
- Cheaper Council registration

Desexing Male Pets

Castration involves removing the testicles. This is done through a small incision in front of the scrotum: in young dogs the empty scrotal sac shrinks and adheres to the abdominal wall. The testicles produce sperm and the male hormone testosterone. Some dogs have undescended testicles; i.e. the testis are not in the scrotal sac but lie in the inguinal canal or in the abdomen.

Desexing males at a young age can reduce the development of testosterone induced behaviour problems such as mounting, masturbation, urine marking and aggression towards other pets. If these behaviours become problems later, they often become part of the dogs' nature and may not be corrected by desexing at a mature age.

The Benefits:

- Less likely to wander; less likely to be involved in traffic accidents and fights. An entire male can smell a female in season over 3kms away
- Entire males can be unpredictable and aggressive when they detect a female in season.
- Reduced tendency towards aggression with other pets and children
- No risk of testicular cancer developing
- Reduces the risk of prostate problems later in life
- Less likely to urinate in your home
- Less likely to mount your furniture or guests!
- More likely to stay home; so make better guard dogs
- Cheaper Council registration

Abolishing the Myths

- Basic temperament and intelligence are not altered by desexing. In fact, many undesirable qualities under hormonal influence may be resolved.
- Desexing will not stop a dog from being a good guard dog. Desexed dogs can easily be trained to alert you to intruders. A dog doesn't need aggression to be a good watch dog, they just need to bark. If you want an aggressive dog to guard your house take care - even a properly contained aggressive dog may land you in trouble with council and neighbours. Consider a good security system - it will cost less and cause less problems in the long run.
- The temperament of females is not likely to improve after having a litter. In fact, the opposite usually occurs. They are often more aggressive, rather than quieter. Their maternal instincts make them over-protective and increase the chance of aggression.
- The temperament of males is improved after desexing. They are less unpredictable and less likely to show dominant aggression to their owners.
- Animals do not need to come into season before desexing. Exposure to the sex hormones can predispose your pet to medical problems later in life. For example, the risk of developing mammary cancers in dogs desexed after one season is increased from 0.5% to 8%, after two seasons the risk is 26%.
- Desexing is not cruel or painful. It is carried out under anaesthesia with strict hygiene controls and monitoring. Strong pain relief and anti-inflammatories are given to minimise any post-operative discomfort.
- Animals do not become less affectionate or playful.
- Your pet is not going to resent you – they will have no sense of missing anything. Entire animals can suffer sexual frustration when females in season are 'within smell' or when they themselves are in season. This can lead to destructiveness and aggression. Desexing eliminates this problem, leading to a happier and well-adjusted family pet.
- Desexing does not cause weight gain – over eating does. Your pets' metabolic rate will be reduced after desexing, so food intake may need to be decreased - watch those titbits!. Adjust your pets' food to meet their remaining growth requirements, their reduced metabolic rate and their level of activity. This can be tricky so drop into reception any time and check their weight. We are happy to record this on their record for easy tracking and give advice if required. Diet and exercise are the key to healthy weight.

- Breeding your pet is not likely to make you any money. This has been tried and tested. Unless you run a professional kennel of pedigree animals with known genetic material, put in a lot of capital, pay proper attention to quality feed, worming and vaccinations, you will likely end up in debt or with an unwell mum or pups.
- Having pups is not always a good experience for the children. Unfortunately, the pregnancy and birth do not always go to plan. Be aware that the female may have trouble having her litter, or some of the pups may die at birth or soon after. Also, it is likely that the birth will occur during the night when children are asleep. A better learning experience is to teach that desexing saves lives by reducing the number of animals that are put to sleep at the RSPCA each year.

What happens on the day:

Desexing is a routine procedure in our veterinary practice – we do this surgery every day. However, we are very aware this is a once in a lifetime experience for your pet and we take the utmost care to reduce stress while they are in our care. Please feel free to bring along a blanket or toy to make them feel more at home, and phone during the day if you have any concerns.

On arrival: your pets' general health will be checked, and a qualified veterinary nurse will be assigned to stay with them during the day. They'll be given a pre-surgery sedation to calm any nerves and setup in their own comfy enclosure in our air-conditioned kennel room. Pre-surgery blood testing will be performed to check the health of their kidneys and liver; these organs process the aesthetic drugs and effect recovery.

During surgery: The procedure is performed by a Veterinary Surgeon under general anaesthetic using strict hygiene controls. Your pet will be given IV fluids to protect against any drop in blood pressure, reduce stress on vital organs and to help speed recovery afterwards. The nurse will monitor and maintain your puppies blood pressure, oxygen levels, heart rate and temperature. Your pet will receive an Australian Veterinary Association ear tattoo to indicate that he/she is desexed. This is a legal requirement in Queensland.

After Surgery: At the end of the procedure your pet will receive two long-lasting injections; one is an antibiotic and the other is a long-lasting pain relief. They will be monitoring by their nurse until they are fully awake. The nurse will then phone you and let you know how they are doing and arrange a convenient pick up time. When you come to collect you pet you'll be given detailed instructions on care requirements at home and an appointment will be arranged for 14 days time to remove the stitches and do a follow-up health check.