

When should I spay or neuter my pet?

This is a loaded question. At this time, there are no studies and no literature to suggest the best time to spay and neuter your pet. At Foothills Animal Hospital we recommend spaying and neutering pets any time after 12 weeks of age as long as they are also at least 3 pounds in weight. We suggest that all pets be sterilized before 6 months of age.

The benefits of spaying/neutering your pets at this age include:

- Significant decrease in blood loss during surgery
- Shortened surgical time
- Quicker recovery from surgery
- Less post-operative discomfort (pain)

Will spaying/neutering my pet early stunt their growth?

The short answer is no. While there is some data to back that growth plates may close more slowly after sterilization, your pet will still grow to be as big as he or she was meant to be in time. This is based more on their genetics than it is on their hormones.

Will spaying/neutering my pet cause hip dysplasia?

Again, the short answer is no. There is an often referenced study done on a small sample group of Golden Retrievers that has gained a lot of attention recently. This study suggests that spaying/neutering your pet will predispose them to hip dysplasia. The issue with this study is the small sample size and the breed used. While Golden Retrievers are wonderful dogs, they are not representative of all dogs. Hip Dysplasia is defined as an abnormal formation of the hip socket and is a genetic trait. There are some environmental factors that will contribute to Hip Dysplasia including the pet's weight, overexertion or repetitive motion at a young age (such as jogging with your puppy while they're less than a year old) and injury.

Will spaying/neutering my pet change their behaviour?

It depends on the behaviour that you're asking about as well as many other factors.

Neutering a male dog may decrease aggressive behaviour that is driven by testosterone (and not by his normal brain chemistry!) It may also decrease his roaming behaviours and risk of getting lost or being hit by a car while roaming as he won't be driven to find a mate.



Spaying your female dog can result in less roaming as well. Spaying may create a more consistent behaviour in your dog as she isn't experiencing hormonal changes. It may also decrease aggressive behaviours driven by estrogen such as fighting and guarding.

Male cats who are neutered have a significant decrease in spraying urine in the house and are less likely to fight with other cats leading to fewer bite wounds and infections.

For female cats, spaying will decrease the yowling and constant pestering they experience when in heat.

One thing to keep in mind is that many of our pets have behavioural abnormalities that are not due to hormones, so you may not notice the behaviour change you were hoping for when you spay or neuter your pet. Also, many behaviours become "learned" behaviour meaning that even when the hormones are removed, the pet will still exhibit them.

Why spay before the first heat cycle?

It is well documented that female cats and dogs are at an increased risk of developing mammary cancers with each heat cycle they experience. You will also start to notice some of the behavioural changes noted above as they start their heat cycles. In dogs especially (more than in female cats) you will notice a bloody discharge from your pet's vulva while they are in estrus. This bleeding can last for 10-12 days. She may urinate more frequently while in heat as she is trying to attract a boyfriend with her pheromones. Your female pet is ready to get pregnant once she has her first heat cycle, regardless of her age when this happens. Male's will be attracted to her scent and will travel great distances, jump fences, and come into your yard or house in an attempt to breed her. You will have to be diligent to keep her contained in your house and supervised in your yard once she has had her first heat cycle.

If you have any questions or concerns about when your pet should be spayed or neutered, we would be happy to discuss your specific situation and help you make that decision!