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Understanding dog and cat spays

What is a spay?

A spay is the complete surgical removal of the female reproductive tract i.e. the ovaries, oviducts and uterus. The procedure is also known as an ovario-hysterectomy or sterilization.

Advantages

- Prevention of unwanted pregnancies.
- Prevention of heat cycles which occur every 6 months in dogs and lasts up to 21 days during which period your dog will leave bloodstains in the house and may become anxious, short tempered and actively seek a mate. Female cats can come on heat every 2 weeks during which time they vocalize excessively and urinate in unacceptable places.
- Animals that are spayed before the first heat rarely develop mammary cancer.
- A spay eliminates any possibility of tumours in the reproductive tract.
- Female dogs and cats may develop a potentially fatal uterine infection called pyometra following their heat cycles. Spaying eliminates this possibility.

When is the right time?

- Having them sterilized around 6 months of age before their first heat cycle is ideal.

Disadvantages

- Complications of sterilization include the usual [anaesthetic](#) and [surgical](#) complications such as bleeding and infection. These risks are relatively low (0.05%) in routine spaying; however, they may be increased for some animals due to other pre-existing health factors. A blood profile can be done to diagnose these pre-existing health factors.
- Spaying dogs and cats increases the risk of [obesity](#) due to a lowered metabolic rate. Dietary therapy and exercise can help to prevent this.
- Spayed female dogs can develop [urinary incontinence](#). Studies report incidence rates of between 4.9% and 20%.

How should I care for my dog/cat at home after the procedure?

- When you get home, offer only small amounts of food and water at first and give them some time to settle down.
- Do not allow other pets/children to pester her.
- Inspect the incision daily and if any redness, swelling or discharge is noted, call your veterinarian.
- Do not allow your pet to lick her wound as this may lead to infections.
- Do not bath your pet or allow swimming until the sutures have been removed.

