

# SPAYING YOUR CAT

The medical term for the “spay” procedure is ovariectomy, often abbreviated OHE. During this procedure, the ovaries and uterus are removed.

## ***Why should I have my cat spayed?***

We recommend spaying all female cats prior to 6 months of age. The benefits to your pet’s health and to help reduce the pet overpopulation crisis make this decision easier.

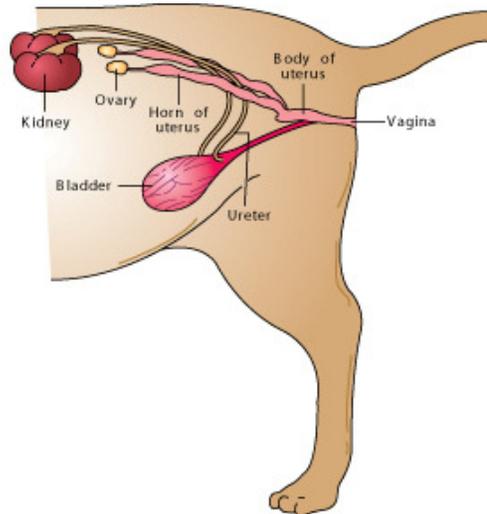
## ***What are the advantages of spaying in the female cat?***

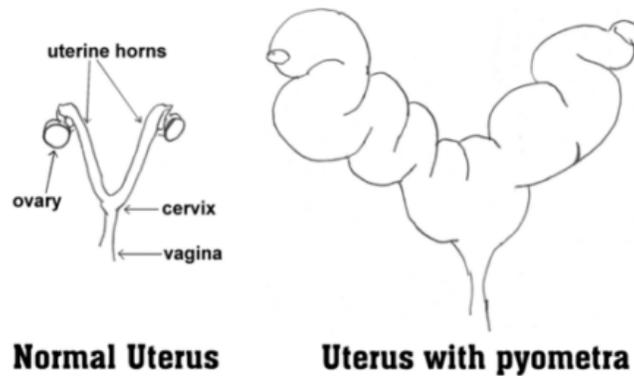
- The obvious – preventing unwanted kittens, when they are killed by the millions in shelters in the US every year. Many times, you can’t find good homes even if you give them away.
- Prevention of “heat” or estrus. When in “heat”, the female experiences an urge to escape in order to find a mate. This unwanted and dangerous behavior is eliminated. Female cats in heat cry and roll around on the floor, are generally obnoxious, and attract male cats from miles around. Once they begin to cycle in the spring, female cats will continue to cycle until they get bred. The older unspayed female cat may have irregular heat cycle, but there is no end of cycling comparable to human menopause.
- It eliminates the possibility of false pregnancy following the “heat cycle.”
- Prevention of uterine infection known as pyometra, which can be life threatening.
- Elimination of the risk of uterine and ovarian cancer.

## ***Is spaying performed for any other reason?***

The operation may be performed for several medical conditions. These include:

- Treatment of intractable false or phantom pregnancy, of mammary hyperplasia.
- Females with irregular or abnormal cycles due to ovarian cysts, which can be painful.
- To help correct certain behavioral problems, such as aggression, fighting, roaming and urine spraying.
- Treatment of uterine infection (pyometra) or cancer.
- Dystocia (difficult birthing) or post caesarean-section surgery.
- To stop seizures precipitated by the heat cycle.
- To reverse insulin dependence in some diabetics.





There are several studies that show that spayed female cats live 39% (4+ years years) longer than intact female cats (Banfield 2013).

### ***What are the disadvantages?***

Obesity is probably the most commonly quoted disadvantage of spaying. There is no question that spaying the female cat in many cases reduces the metabolic rate, so that fewer calories are needed each day. However, obesity is the result of overfeeding and lack of physical activity. By regulating your cat's diet and caloric intake, you can easily prevent obesity in spayed female cats. In certain cats, notably the Siamese breed, the hair that grows back over an operation site may be noticeably darker, believed to be due to a difference in the skin temperature. This darker patch may grow out with the following molt as the hair is naturally replaced.

### ***When should the operation be performed?***

Most veterinarians recommend spaying between four and six months of age, prior to the first heat. It is possible to spay your cat while she is in heat or pregnant.

### ***What about ovariectomy?***

Some veterinarians recommend removing only the ovaries, rather than both the ovaries and the uterus. This can be done a little bit faster, and can sometimes be done through a smaller incision, that theoretically may cause less post-operative discomfort for the patient. Some veterinarians have theorized that pyometra will not happen in a dog or cat that has no ovaries, because the ovaries cause changes in the uterus over time that predispose to pyometra. However, pyometra has been reported in ovariectomized female dogs.

### ***Are there any dangers associated with the operation?***

Spaying is considered a major operation and requires general anesthesia. With modern anesthetics and monitoring equipment, the risk of a complication is very low. Minor complications occur at a rate of 3-5% and major complications at a rate of 0.3-0.5%. Death due to spay is not impossible, but it is extremely rare. It has been said that your pet has a greater chance of being injured in a car wreck than having an anesthetic or surgical complication.

### ***What happens when I leave my cat for this procedure?***

Make sure you take up all food after dinner time the night before surgery. There is no need to withhold water – we will take up the water when you bring your cat in on the morning of surgery, prior to 9am.

Your pet will be examined by your veterinarian and pre-anesthetic blood tests will usually be performed. If everything is acceptable, your pet will then be anesthetized. After your pet is anesthetized, a breathing tube will be placed in her windpipe. This will allow the delivery of oxygen and the gas anesthetic directly into the lungs. The surgery consists of making a small incision just below the belly button and removing the ovaries and uterus. Many veterinarians use absorbable sutures to close so that you do not have to return to have them removed.

Your pet will need to stay indoors the night after surgery, in a place that is warm, dry and supervised. Many vets prefer to send patients home the evening after a spay, and others allow them to go home, if adequate after-care can be provided at home.

### ***Are there any post-operative precautions I should take?***

The evening after surgery, small amounts of water or ice cubes can be offered, as long as there is no vomiting. Nausea and vomiting for about 12 hours after anesthesia is not uncommon. Pain medication can be given as directed. The following morning, a small meal can be offered, and after that you can gradually return to normal feeding. Rest and restriction of activity are the primary post-operative care you should provide. Most cats can resume normal activity five to ten days after surgery. Until then, no running or climbing stairs and lots of rest are the rule. You will get more specific instructions when you take your cat home after surgery.

Later in the recovery period, it is not unusual to notice swelling at the incision site. Cats often react this way to internal sutures and this kind of swelling is common and resolves spontaneously. Such swellings are firm and there is no fluid drainage or bleeding from the incision. They generally resolve in 3 to 4 weeks and are a reaction to the dissolving of internal stitches. That said, it is prudent for any incisional swelling to be checked out.

Occasionally spaying a cat in heat leads to dramatic mammary gland development in the recovery period. This is because the sudden drop in progesterone levels that happen after removing the active ovaries mimics the drop in progesterone that accompanies giving birth to kittens. The subsequent mammary development (called mammary hyperplasia) can be spectacular but generally resolves without treatment as hormones normalize.

### ***I am told that letting my cat have one litter will calm her down.***

There is no scientific evidence that having kittens has any calming psychological effect, and there are no known health benefits for cats. This is quite honestly more myth than fact. Spaying doesn't cause a change in personality, intelligence, playfulness, energy level or affection.

---

#### ***References:***

*Ernest Ward, DVM.- LifeLearn Handouts*

*Wendy Blount, DVM – PracticalVetMed.com*

*Wendy Brooks, DVM – VeterinaryPartner.com*