

Spaying Your Cat

Spaying, or ovariectomy, is a surgical sterilization procedure that can provide major health benefits for cats. Here are some important facts you should know before getting your cat spayed.

The Spay Surgery

The ovariectomy is an abdominal surgery that is performed under general anesthesia. Your cat's belly will be shaved and cleansed, and an incision will be made a few inches below her belly-button. The veterinarian will remove both ovaries as well as the uterus. Several layers of stitches will close the incision internally. Your veterinarian may also close the skin with stitches, or may use a surgical adhesive. Following spay surgery, your cat will no longer go through heat cycles and will be unable to get pregnant.

Although the spay surgery is very routine, it is still a major abdominal operation. It carries the risks normally associated with general anesthesia and surgery. Your veterinarian takes numerous measures to keep your cat safe, such as checking her heart and lungs before administering anesthesia and monitoring her constantly while she is asleep. You can ask whether your veterinarian recommends any additional safety precautions, such as pre-anesthetic blood tests or administration of IV fluids during the procedure.

Benefits

Unspayed female cats usually go through three heat periods each year. During her heat period, your female cat may drip blood. She will also make every effort to sneak out to find a mate. As a result, she is at high risk for being hit by a car.

Unspayed female cats suffer from a high incidence of mammary tumors, false pregnancies, uterine infections, and reproductive cancers. Spaying your cat greatly reduces the risks of these cancers. It has been said that it may be beneficial to let your cat produce one litter of kittens before she is spayed; however, this is not at all necessary.

The final benefit of spaying is that it's the best way you can help end pet overpopulation. Every year, 3-4 million cats and dogs are euthanized in U.S. animal shelters. None of us wants to contribute to that sad statistic, but we may do so unwittingly. Cats adopted to apparently good homes may be given away or lost.

Considerations Before Surgery

Consult with your veterinarian about when to schedule your cat's spay surgery. Traditionally, pets are spayed at around six months of age. However, some veterinarians advocate performing the procedure earlier. If possible, schedule your cat's surgery when she is not in heat.

The night before your cat's surgery, remove her food and water before you go to bed. She should not eat or drink anything during the night or the morning of her surgery.

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Considerations After Surgery

Your cat may go home the day of her surgery, or may stay in the hospital overnight. If she goes home the same day, expect her to feel a little groggy. Keep her indoors, in a warm, safe, quiet room away from other pets. During the first week after surgery, try to restrict her activity level. Mild swelling and soreness are common, but let your veterinarian know if you see any discharge or if the swelling is excessive. It is very important to keep the litter box very clean for your cat following surgery.

If your cat was in heat when she was spayed, she will continue to attract males during this time. Keep her away from male cats during her recovery so that she isn't accidentally injured. Stitches, if present, will need to be removed in about 10-14 days. If you have any concerns about your cat following her surgery, do not hesitate to call your veterinarian.

