



Marian's Dream

Philanthropy for Animal Advocates

The Real Story: Spay & Neuter Before Five Months



As a small animal veterinarian in a rural practice, I frequently encounter pets that have not been spayed or neutered, either because of financial concerns or lack of owner education. Many times the mature intact females will present with mammary tumors, complications related to pregnancy, or potentially life-threatening uterine infections. These conditions create unnecessary pain and suffering for the animal and a large financial burden on the owner. And they are very easy and relatively inexpensive to prevent, simply by spaying before five months old.

Pet overpopulation is a serious concern, and one of the first steps to tackling this issue is early spay/neuter. Far too many dogs and cats are euthanized every day simply because there are more animals than homes. Delaying a spay until after the first heat cycle can have surprising consequences. If a dog or cat is allowed to have one litter before she is spayed, assuming two females and two males are born in the litter and each female born has one litter, when this cycle is repeated for only six generations (possibly as little as three years), that is 125 new puppies or kittens in need of a home. This will inevitably lead to more shelter euthanasias. Owner education is critical to breaking this cycle. Not only do I teach all of my clients the importance of early spay-neuter, but my own pets are all spayed or neutered by four months old.

Megan Dunn, DVM
Lawrenceburg, TN



Kittens and puppies recover from surgery much quicker than adult animals. They have less body fat, so there is less tissue to cut through, making the surgery itself faster. The shorter surgery time means less anesthesia, and combined with a kitten's or puppy's fast metabolism, it makes for a quick recovery and many will be up and playing the same day of surgery. Kittens and puppies can be spayed or neutered as early as 8 weeks and 2 pounds. During kitten and puppy season more than half of the animals we spay/neuter are five months old or younger (we average 260 total animals a week), and we routinely spay/neuter our shelter animals at 8 weeks old. From experience, we know that kittens and puppies also have lower rates of post-operative complications.

There are also health benefits to spaying by 5 months of age. By fixing pets before puberty (which occurs in cats as early as 4 months, and in dogs around 6 months), you ensure that females never have a first heat cycle. Every heat cycle increases an animal's chance of developing mammary tumors, which is like breast cancer in people. Female dogs are four times as likely as humans to develop mammary cancer, which is often fatal. By spaying before the first heat, you can almost completely eliminate the chances of your pet ever developing this cancer. Spaying and neutering before puberty also reduces the chances your pet will start urine marking; females may do this when in heat, and males tend to start this territorial behavior at puberty. Males also tend to want to roam in search of a female to mate with, so neutering before sexual maturity will reduce this hormone-related behavior.

Finally, a kitten or puppy spayed or neutered before puberty will never produce an accidental litter. More than half of litters born to pets are unintended, and each litter contributes to pet overpopulation. Overall, we recommend spaying or neutering by 5 months of age.

Richard Speck, DVM
Animal Protective League

The campaign for encouraging "Beat the Heat" by spaying and neutering the younger pups and kittens by 5 months is based on over 20 years of studies and evaluation and sometimes rancorous discussions of what was called *early age sterilization*.



When we take a look at the inevitable damage caused by unintended, unplanned, and unwanted pregnancies when spay is delayed until 6 months or later, we see:

- Greatly increased incidence of mammary gland tumors - they are virtually unheard of when spayed before the first heat.
- Undesirable behavioral tendencies related to hormonal influences
- Abandonment - millions of homeless kittens and puppies who end up on the streets or in the shelters

Beating the heat solves so many problems with one simple fix!

W. Marvin Mackie, DVM retired
Practice limited to spay/neuter clinics
from 1976 - 2008

What's the REAL STORY?

Listen to what veterinarians - in both private & academic practices - have to say!

In addition to many health and behavior benefits associated with early age gonadectomy, several studies have reported that pets who are spayed or neutered are more likely to stay in their homes! The risk:benefit ratio is absolutely in favor of spaying and neutering cats and dogs. It is simply good medicine!



Brenda Griffin, DVM, MS, DACVIM
Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, College of Veterinary Medicine University of Florida

I graduated from veterinary school in 1972. When I walked across the stage that day to get my DVM degree I was oblivious to the fact that in 1971 over 23 million dogs and cats were killed in animal shelters in the United States alone. 23 million.



I learned very quickly that there was a problem. A big problem. My period of being aware, naïve, ignorant lasted only days not years. But most veterinarians are completely unaware of the problem. We cannot expect people to work on solving a problem that they do not even know exists. And the problem still exists. Current estimates are that approximately 4 million dogs and cats are killed in shelters in the U.S. each year. If you consider an 8 hour work day, 5 days a week that comes to nearly 1 animal euthanized every 2 seconds. One every two seconds.

If you walk into your house and find that a faucet has been left running and the basement is flooded, what do you do? Start bailing water - or turn off the faucet??? For us, turning off the faucet is spaying/neutering. We must reduce the source of the unwanted puppies and kittens, dogs and cats. And we must do that through spay neuter. Before the cat or dog has even one litter. Because only then will we reduce the numbers pouring into the shelters and onto the streets. Spay before the first heat - and be part of the solution.

Philip Bushby, DVM
Marcia Lane Endowed Professor of
Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare, Department of Clinical Sciences
College of Veterinary Medicine, Mississippi State