

Dear Spring Oaks' Family:

The March topic of the month is spaying and neutering dogs and cats.

I would like to start with the medical benefits of spaying and neutering. Spaying female dogs and cats is equivalent to an ovariectomy (removing the ovaries and uterus) in humans. Studies in dogs have shown that dogs spayed prior to their first heat cycle virtually eliminates any chance of mammary (breast) cancer later in life. Approximately 50% of mammary tumors in dogs are malignant so by spaying a dog we are preventing a potentially life threatening condition. Since most dogs start their heat cycles at approximately 6 months of age, Spring Oaks recommends dogs be spayed at 5 months of age.

The second potentially life threatening condition that can be prevented by spaying a female dog or cat is a pyometra (infection of the uterus). Dogs in particular are prone to pyometra due to the very high levels of a hormone called progesterone that they produce during their cycles. This high level of progesterone can suppress the immune function of the uterus allowing bacteria from the vagina to ascend into the uterus causing infection. Without an emergency spay, a dog with pyometra may die. Dogs with pyometra may have very vague clinical signs such as loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting, excessive thirst, and may or may not have vaginal discharge. Because of the vagueness of the signs we may recommend radiographs (x-rays) and a complete blood count to help us diagnose this condition.

The medical reasons to neuter male dogs include eliminating the possibility of testicular cancer and eliminating many prostatic problems including benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) and prostatic infections. There are three types of testicular tumors in the dog. While relatively uncommon, the incidence of testicular cancer dramatically increases if the dog is cryptorchid (retained one or both testicles). If a dog has one or both retained testicles he should definitely be neutered and should not be bred as this trait can be passed to the offspring. BPH is the same increase in prostate size that can occur in humans due to constant bombardment of the prostate by testosterone. I have seen a few dogs with this condition whose prostate became so enlarged they could not urinate or defecate without straining and pain.

There are also several behavioral reasons to spay and neuter dogs and cats. Tom cats will often begin urine marking by spraying vertical surfaces if not neutered. This is often preventable if the cat is neutered prior to developing the behavior. In addition, non-neutered male cats are very territorial and are more prone to fighting with other cats causing bite wound abscesses and potentially spreading infectious diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (feline aids).

Female cats are "long day" breeders. This means that the cats begin their hormonal cycle once the first day of winter passes and the days start getting longer. A non-spayed female cat will continue to repeat her heat cycle over and over again until she either gets

pregnant or the days get shorter again. Often, female cats are disruptively annoying when in heat, yowling and carrying on. Spaying them stops this cycle.

With male dogs the only behavior changes are ones that could cause the dog to get in trouble if not neutered. The dog's personality will not change but the interest in roaming is eliminated in 90% of neutered dogs. Aggressive behavior against other male dogs is eliminated in 60% of neutered dogs. Urine marking is eliminated in 50% of neutered male dogs. Inappropriate mounting is eliminated in 70% of neutered dogs.

I have many clients who ask if their pet will become over-weight or lethargic with spaying/neutering. Some veterinarians will tell you that activity level and appetite do not change with neutering. Some believe the metabolism slows. Ultimately, you control the groceries. It is beneficial for longevity and health to keep your dogs and cats on the thin side so if you notice a weight gain, reduce the amount of food offered and increase exercise.

Spring Oaks has three available surgery days for spays and neuters, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The dogs and cats need to be fasted for 12 hours prior to the procedure. We recommend pre-anesthetic blood work to make sure the pet's kidneys and liver can handle anesthesia. This is generally performed the morning of the procedure and may be optional for some young, healthy, pets. We also recommend an intravenous catheter and fluid therapy during the procedure. The catheter allows us to administer fluids to help support blood pressure during surgery and gives us intravenous access for any medications that may be needed. This may also be optional for some young, healthy pets. Surgeries are generally performed in the morning. All pets receive an injection for pain and an antibiotic injection. Most patients can go home that afternoon and return in 10 days for suture removal.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the spay/neuter procedure please schedule a consult with Dr. Alshouse or myself.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Jackson