

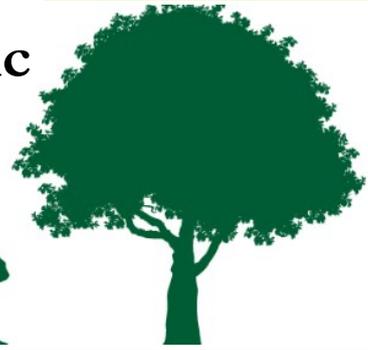
**Damory Veterinary  
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# Damory Veterinary Clinic

## Small Animal Factsheet



### NEUTERING

Definitions:

- Spay* - Removal of the ovaries and the womb  
*Castrate* - Removal of the testis  
*Vasectomy* - Cutting the spermatic ducts to stop male animal being fertile but still keeping its male characteristics.

Across all species the common reason for neutering is population control and as such the practice encourages neutering as part of responsible pet ownership. There are many reasons to advocate neutering in addition to simple population control and there are also some potential pitfalls which should not be disregarded. A summary of the advantages (and disadvantages where applicable) of neutering in individual species is summarised below.

#### Dogs

Bitches – Advantages

Early neutering has a strong protective effect against the development of mammary tumours later in life.

Pyometra is a potentially life threatening uterine infection which is very common in middle aged to older bitches and is obviously prevented by spaying.

Prevention of false pregnancies after a bitch has been in season which can sometimes be distressing for the bitch.

Avoiding the inconvenience of having a bitch in season with regard to walking and cleanliness.

Avoiding the possibility of unwanted matings and costly pregnancy prevention treatments.

Preventative effect against the development of vaginal tumours

- Disadvantages

Some bitches have an inherently short bladder neck and the loss of the female hormone (oestrogen) can render a small proportion of bitches prone to leaking incontinence especially as they age. This is easily treatable with hormones to help tighten up the bladder muscles.

Energy requirements drop following neutering and therefore weight gain is possible. We advise monitoring weight and adjusting food intake accordingly.

Some bitches will develop a frizzy or shaggy coat following neutering

The timing of neutering in bitches is an ongoing debate. It is well accepted that neutering early has a protective effect against the development of mammary tumours. What is debatable is whether to spay before or after the first season. Spaying before the first season has the advantage of a smaller dog with a less developed uterus and therefore the operation tends to be a little easier. There appears to be no evidence that potential incontinence issues are worse spayed before the first season. Therefore we are in favour of routine neutering at 6 months of age.

Spaying can still be carried out later in life but, obviously, many of the advantages may have been lost by this stage. It is recommended to spay a bitch 3-4 months after they have been in season.

#### Male Dogs - Advantages

- Control of hypersexual behaviour
- Control of male dominance aggression
- Prevention of most prostatic problems
- Prevention of herniation of the rectal wall (perineal hernia)
- Prevention of anal tumours (anal adenomas)
- Less frustration for an unfulfilled male dog in the presence of bitches on heat

#### - Disadvantages

As for bitches – potential weight gain and coat changes

Dogs are generally castrated at 6-12 mths but can easily be done later if people wish to see how they develop behaviourally before deciding.

#### Cats

##### Queens (female cats)- Advantage

- Prevention of pregnancy and unwanted kittens
- Prevention of Calling where cats will constantly yowl to attract a mate
- Prevention of uterine infection (pyometra)
- Lowering the incidence of mammary tumours

##### Tom Cats- Advantages

- Reduction in the number of unwanted kittens
- Reduction of spraying urine and territory marking
- Reduction of wandering behaviour and therefore getting lost and potentially being involved in road accidents
- Reduction in fighting and therefore transmission of the blood borne viruses Feline Immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and Feline leukaemia virus (FeLV)

Cats are generally neutered at 4-6 months of age.

#### Rabbits

In both male and female rabbits neutering can control aggression. One particular issue in female rabbits is the common development of uterine adenocarcinoma, a malignant cancer of the womb in later life. This is a common cause of death amongst middle aged and older rabbits and is preventable by spaying. Neutering of male and female rabbits can be carried out from 4 months of age.

Neutering male rabbits can reduce aggression, urine spraying and make house training easier.

**Ferrets**

Female ferrets (Jills) are reflex ovulators which means that they remain in season until they are mated at which time they will release an egg. If they are not mated this can have serious health implications as persistently high hormone levels can result in profound anaemia. Two alternatives are available to address this. Either the Jill can be spayed or a companion male ferret (Hob) can be vasectomised in order to allow mating and thereby stop the seasons but without the risk of pregnancy.

Spaying female ferrets can occasionally lead to a condition called hyperadrenocorticism. Common signs of this is hairloss from their flanks. This can be addressed by surgical removal of the adrenal glands or hormonal implants.

**Other small mammals**

From time to time we neuter other small mammals, particularly Guinea Pigs - who can get ovarian cysts. Spaying prevents this.

Neutering male Guinea Pigs can reduce aggression (although not always), but is recommended if keeping in pairs or groups.

*Updated July 2015*