

## **Sterilisation, Part II**

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In Sterilisation, Part I, we looked at the symptoms of a female dog or cat being “on heat”, and the response this generates from male animals. In this article, we consider some of the reasons people give for not neutering their pets.

### **Won't Frisky get fat?**

It's not sterilization that causes weight gain. It's too much food and/or too little exercise. Many animals do become slightly less active after sterilization, and therefore require less food energy. Monitor your animal's weight, and adjust the diet and exercise levels accordingly.

### **But Friendly is so special - I want another just like her**

Unfortunately, genetics doesn't work that way. Even if the greatest care is taken in selecting both the male and female parent, there is no guarantee that any of the offspring will closely resemble your beloved pet. And what if the puppies or kittens inherit all the parents' worst characteristics?

### **My children should experience the miracle of birth.**

Learning about reproduction does not require real-life examples, especially if there is a risk that you'll be left “holding the puppies / kittens” in 8 weeks time. And despite the best planning, many births go unseen, as they usually happen at night and often in a secluded spot. There are many excellent books and DVD's which are better educational resources on this topic.

### **But breeding is easy money, isn't it?**

Perhaps for some people, but it is often quite the reverse. Breeding can be very expensive – there is the cost of obtaining and caring for the mother and/or father; stud fees; medical tests and X-rays before breeding, and the possible complications of birth, such as emergency caesarean sections. And then there are all the costs of feeding, de-worming and vaccinating the little ones. In some cases litters are very small, with only one or two pups or kittens, so income is minimal and doesn't cover the associated costs. Other times, good homes cannot be found for all the little ones – what then?

### **But I just can't afford the operation!**

If you truly can't afford the sterilization operation, you should approach the SPCA which is able to provide these services at a reduced price to those who can't afford them. For the rest of us, remember that, whatever the cost, sterilization is a “once off” cost. Unsterilized animals are at greater risk of injury, and of developing cancer and contracting other diseases, which will ultimately cost a lot of money in vets' bills, often more than the cost of the operation itself.

### **Don't anthropomorphise!**

There are a lot of emotional transferences from humans to their animals. Remember that dogs and cats are not four-footed humans – their sexual behaviour is driven by hormones and instinct, and is

not voluntary. They do not suffer the emotional effects of 'losing their manhood' and they do not need to have a litter to fulfil emotional or physical needs.

Many owners want their female to have one litter before spaying. There is no medical evidence that Friendly will benefit in any way from experiencing her first heat or having a litter before she is spayed. In fact, the evidence is that it is better for her to be spayed before she has her first heat, as this reduces the risk of mammary cancer, and prevents many of the health risks associated with pregnancy and birth.

And many people are much more reluctant to neuter a male dog than to spay a female. Remember that unlike females, the males of the species are always ready to mate. Searching for a female on heat exposes them to many dangers, such as car accidents and fighting, and may make them very difficult to control. And they do bear half the responsibility for the all litters.

**OK, I'm convinced. When can I have Friendly and Frisky neutered?**

Under normal circumstances, dogs and cats, males and females, can be sterilized anytime from 6 months of age. If medically necessary, or if the animal displays signs of early sexual maturity, the operation may be performed earlier. Much older animals can also be neutered. While the benefits may be reduced, it's never too late.

**Conclusion**

Be a responsible owner. Unless your pet is a sterling example of the breed that will contribute to improving the gene pool, sterilize. You will save a lot of time, trouble and money. Your pet will be calmer and more content, and should have a longer and happier life.