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A Winn Foundation Health Article On ...

Early Spay/Neuter in the Cat

Early Spay/Neuter in the Cat
by Susan Little DVM

While it may seem that interest in early spay/neuter is a recent phenomenon, it has not only been talked about, but it has been practiced for over 25 years in North America. Early age altering refers to spays and neuters done between the age of 6 and 14 weeks. Altering pets between 5 and 7 months of age was established by tradition rather than for any specific medical reason. Years ago, when safe pediatric anesthetic techniques were not available, waiting until a patient was older increased the safety of surgery. But we no longer need to delay altering for this reason.

People working to decrease the problem of surplus dogs and cats in the United States pioneered the idea of early altering. While surgical sterilization remains the most effective means of population control, delaying the surgery long enough for sexual maturity to occur defeats the purpose. Animal shelters advocate mandatory altering, but many adopted animals either are never altered or have at least one litter first.

Over the years, the safety of early altering has been questioned, mainly by veterinarians who may be unfamiliar with the surgical and anesthetic techniques required for pediatric patients. As well, concerns that early altering could increase the incidence of feline lower urinary tract disease, could affect skeletal development, and affect behavior have been voiced. These concerns have largely been laid to rest by many studies, and early altering is becoming more widespread and available. A study recently published by researchers at the University of Florida found no significant differences in the physical and behavioral characteristics of cats altered at 7 weeks of age compared to those altered at 7 months of age.

Very important work has been done by Drs. Michael Aronsohn and Alicia Faggella at the Massachusetts SPCA on the anesthetic and surgical techniques for early altering of dogs and cats. In 1993, two papers were published outlining their work on the early altering of hundreds of kittens between the age of 6 and 14 weeks. They evaluated several anesthetic protocols and made recommendations for safe handling and anesthesia in patients of this age. Some small changes to surgical technique are necessary for patients in this age group. As well, these young patients must be handled a bit differently both before, during, and after surgery. The changes in surgical protocol are simple and easy to carry out, and the experience of these veterinarians with early altering is overwhelmingly positive.

As cat breeders, we must do our part to curtail the serious issue of surplus animals. Many of us work in breed rescue programs and give our time and expertise to shelters. We can ensure that our own kittens not destined for breeding programs will never reproduce by practicing early altering. Early altering is a safe and effective means of ensuring we do not unwittingly add to the burden of unwanted pets.

Further Information on Early Spay/Neuter may be found in the following:

1. Aronsohn MG, Faggella AM. Surgical techniques for neutering 6- to-14-week-old kittens. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(1);53-55, 1993.
2. Chalifoux A, Niemi G, Fanjoy P, Pukay B. Early spay-neutering of dogs and cats (letter). *Canadian Veterinary Journal* Vol 22; 381, 1981.
3. Faggella AM, Aronsohn MG. Anesthetic techniques for neutering 6- to-14-week-old kittens. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(1);56-62, 1993.
4. Hosgood G. Anesthesia and surgical considerations in Hoskins JD (ed) *Veterinary Pediatrics - dogs and cats from birth to six months*, Philadelphia, WB Saunders Co., p. 561, 1995.
5. Lieberman LL. Advantages of early spaying and neutering (letter). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 181(5);420, 1982.
6. Lieberman LL. A case for neutering pups and kittens at two months of age. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 191(5);518-521, 1987.
7. Root MV, Johnston SD, Johnston GR, Olson PN. The effect of prepuberal and postpuberal gonadectomy on penile extrusion and urethral diameter in the domestic cat. *Veterinary Radiology & Ultrasound* Vol 37(5);363-366, 1996.
8. Stubbs WP, Bloomberg MS. Implications of early neutering in the dog and cat. *Seminars in Veterinary Medicine and Surgery (Small Animal)* Vol 10 (1);8-12, 1995.
9. Stubbs WP, Salmeri KR, Bloomberg MS. Early neutering of the dog and cat in Bonagura JD, Kirk RW (eds) *Kirk's Current Veterinary Therapy XII Small Animal Practice*, Philadelphia, WB Saunders Co., p. 1037, 1995.
10. Theran P. Early-age neutering of dogs and cats. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Assoc* Vol 202(6);914-917, 1993.

Related Links:

- [Cat Facts: Neuter and Spay Programs](#)
- [Neuter or Spay - It's the Humane Way](#)
- [Early Spay/Neuter in the Cat - a Winn Feline Foundation Report](#)

Please Note: The Winn Feline Foundation provides the feline health information on this site as a service to the public. Diagnosis and treatment of specific conditions should always be in consultation with one's own veterinarian. The Winn Feline Foundation disclaims all warranties and liability related to the veterinary advice and information provided on this site.

NOTE:

The Winn Feline Foundation, organized primarily to fund health studies benefitting cats, unfortunately is not staffed to provide medical information or assistance on an individual basis.

FYI, the Cornell University Feline Health Center operates a medical information "hotline" available to both practicing veterinarians and pet owners at 1-800-548-8937. Note that there may be a charge for consulting with them.

Your own veterinarian is, of course, your best source for information.

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