



North Bay Animal Hospital

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Neutering in Cats

What is meant by castration or neutering?

Neutering and castration are the common terms used to describe the surgical procedure known scientifically as *orchidectomy* or *orchiectomy*. In this procedure, both testicles are removed in order to sterilize a male cat.

Why should I have my cat neutered?

Once a male cat reaches puberty, he will develop a number of behavioral changes that will make him a less desirable pet. He will become territorial and start to mark areas, even inside the house, by spraying urine. This urine has a particularly offensive odor that is difficult to remove. As the tomcat reaches sexual maturity, he will start to enlarge his territory, straying ever farther from the house, particularly at night.

"The longer a tomcat sprays and fights, the less likely neutering will stop these behaviors."

By increasing the size of his territory, he increases the likelihood that he will encounter other cats and get into fights for territorial dominance. The longer a tomcat sprays and fights, the less likely neutering will stop these behaviors.

Fight wounds can result in severe infections and abscesses. Diseases such as FIV and FeLV, which cause immunosuppression and AIDS-like syndromes, are spread through cat bites. These incurable diseases tend to be more common in non-neutered male cats last, but not least, humane societies and animal shelters are overrun with unwanted kittens and cats, and neutering decreases the number of needless deaths.

When should I have my cat neutered?

In most cases, it is recommended to neuter your cat before the onset of puberty. Puberty normally begins between six and ten months of age. Many veterinarians recommend castration at around five to seven months of age, although it is becoming more common to perform this procedure at an earlier age, such as two to three months, in an attempt to control pet overpopulation. Please contact your veterinary hospital for further details regarding their specific sterilization recommendations.

What does the operation involve?

This major surgical procedure requires general anesthesia. You will need to fast your cat the night prior to surgery.

You will be asked to admit your cat into the hospital on the morning of her procedure. You will need to plan on approximately 10–15 minutes to allow for the signing of consent forms and admission by a registered veterinary technician (RVT). The RVT assigned to your pet will follow your cat through her entire stay in the hospital, assist the veterinarian during her surgery and look after all his nursing care during her stay.

Although the sedatives, anesthetics and medications we will be using are considered very safe, they do need to be processed and eliminated by your cat's system. The liver and kidneys are partially responsible for this processing. To ensure your cat is in optimum health to process necessary medications and undergo the surgical procedure a few blood tests will be run to assess your cat's liver, kidneys, blood count and blood glucose levels. If there are any abnormalities in these results we will contact you immediately and any decisions about proceeding with the surgery will be discussed with your veterinarian.

After receiving conformation of normal blood results, your cat will be examined by the veterinarian and if deemed fit for surgery, will be given a mild sedative by injection to relax your cat. This sedative will take 10–15 minutes to be effective. At this time an intravenous catheter will be placed in a blood vessel in the front or hind leg. A small square of skin may be clipped to allow us to sterilize the area and visualize the vein for insertion of the catheter. This catheter will be used to administer intravenous fluids during and after the surgery to ensure your cat is properly hydrated through out the procedure and during his recovery. This also allows us to have immediate intravenous access should we need to add any medication during the procedure.

An injectable anesthetic (barbituate) is given through the intravenous line to initiate the general anesthetic. An endotracheal tube made of soft plastic is then inserted into the wind pipe to administer oxygen and a gas anesthetic, called isoflurane, to allow us to maintain your pet under general anesthesia for as long as necessary. While under anesthesia you pet will be breathing on his own but will not be awake. Your pet will not be able to feel the surgical procedure. Your cat's heart rate, blood oxygen level and blood pressure will be used to monitor him while asleep. The RVT assigned to your cat will assist the veterinarian during the entire procedure and during recovery. Her primary job will be to monitor and adjust the anesthetic on the veterinarian's direction.

A square of skin over the scrotum will be plucked free of hair and prepared with a series of disinfecting solutions to sterilize the skin surface. One of these is a bright pink colour and traces of this solution may persist on the skin when your cat goes home. The plucked hair may take 8–12 weeks or more to regrow.

The operation is performed through two relatively small incisions. Both testicles are removed. The procedure will take 15–30 minutes.

To ensure a smooth transition from anesthetic and to maximally control for the possibility of post-operative discomfort, your cat will be given pain medication by injection. All cats will receive an anti-inflammatory and a morphine-like narcotic. The veterinarian and the RVT will monitor your cat's recovery and adjust post-op medication when needed. Our goal is for your cat to always be pain free. Heat loss and low body temperatures during and after an anesthetic is a concern, in pets under 10 kg. All patients are recovered in warm blankets in our recovery area.

Once your cat is awake and able to walk, he will be returned to her kennel. Cats are sensitive and easily stressed. To minimize this, they are hospitalized in a quiet "cat only" area. We call this the "cat room" and it is customized with cozy cat friendly cages that we equip with all the comforts of home—blankets, litter box, food and water and catnip if needed! As well, we use Feliway diffusers which reduce stress in cats by emitting a "happy cat" pheromone that only cats can detect—this is a very helpful tool.

Many veterinary hospitals release their surgical patients the same day, but we prefer to hospitalize them over night for a few reasons. Many pets are sleepy and disoriented after a general anesthetic procedure and are safest in a confined area where they can't harm themselves. Your cat will be monitored throughout the day and will be able to go home in the late afternoon. You will be provided with medication to give at home that will aid in your cat continuing to be pain free during her recovery.

What surgical complications could arise?

In general, complications are rare during a castration surgery, however, as with all surgical procedures, there is always a small risk. Potential complications may include:

Anesthetic complications

Any cat can have an unexpected adverse reaction following the administration of any drug or anesthetic. Such cases are impossible to predict, but fortunately are extremely rare.

Another potential danger associated with anesthesia arises if the cat is not properly fasted prior to anesthesia. Anesthetized patients lose the normal reflex ability to swallow; during swallowing, the epiglottis, a cartilage flap at the entrance to the windpipe, closes and prevents food or water from entering the lungs. If there is food in the stomach, the cat could vomit while under anesthesia or in the early post-anesthetic period, allowing the food to enter the lungs and cause aspiration pneumonia, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Illness will increase the risks associated with anesthesia. Pre-operative blood work is a useful screening test that may detect pre-existing problems that could interfere with the pet's ability to handle anesthetic drugs.

To minimize the risks to your cat, it is essential that all pre-operative instructions are strictly followed and that you report any signs of illness to your veterinarian prior to an operation.

Post-operative infection

This may occur internally or around the incision wound. In most cases, the infection can be controlled with antibiotics.

What adverse effects might castration have on my cat?

"No adverse effects are noted following neutering."

In the vast majority of cats, no adverse effects are noted following neutering. In certain cats, notably the Siamese breed, the hair that grows back over an operation site may be noticeably darker, believed to be due to a difference in the skin temperature. This darker patch usually grows out with the following molt as the hair is naturally replaced.

What things should I consider when shopping for a cat neuter?

1. What kind of anesthetics will be used?
2. Are medications sent home with your cat for post-operative pain control?
3. Does the clinic employ RVTs to help with surgeries, anesthetic monitoring, and nursing care?
4. Are surgical patients provided with intravenous fluid therapy during their procedure?

5. Where is my cat kept during his hospital stay?

6. Is preanesthetic blood work recommended to ensure safety under general anesthetic? If not recommended why not?

7. What will happen if there are any post-operative complications?

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM

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