



North Bay Animal Hospital

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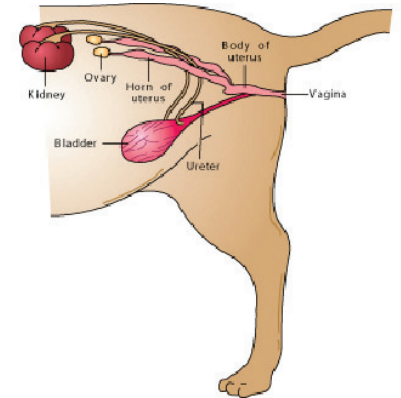
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Ovariohysterectomy in Cats

What is meant by ovariohysterectomy or spaying?

Spaying is the common term used to describe the surgical procedure known scientifically as an *ovariohysterectomy*. In this procedure, the ovaries and uterus are removed completely in order to sterilize a female cat.



Why should I have my cat spayed?

We recommend that all non-breeding cats be sterilized. Several health benefits are associated with spaying your cat. First, spaying eliminates the risk of ovarian and uterine cancers. Second, breast cancer is the number one type of cancer diagnosed in intact or un-spayed female cats. If your cat is spayed before her first heat cycle, there is less than ½ of 1% (0.5%) chance of developing breast cancer. With every subsequent heat cycle, the risk of developing breast cancer increases. After about 2½ years of age, ovariohysterectomy offers no protective benefit against developing breast cancer.

Finally, cats with diabetes or epilepsy should be spayed to prevent hormonal changes that may interfere with medications.

Are there other benefits to spaying my cat?

"There is no behavioral, medical or scientific reason for letting your cat have a litter before she is spayed."



The most obvious benefit is the prevention of unplanned pregnancies. There is no behavioral, medical or scientific reason for letting your cat have a litter before she is spayed.

Once a cat reaches puberty, usually at around seven months of age, she will have a heat or estrus cycle every two to three weeks for most of the year, unless she becomes pregnant. She will be "in heat" or receptive to mating for approximately one week in each cycle. During "heat", she may display unsociable behavior such as loud and persistent crying and frequent rubbing and rolling on the floor. This behavior coupled with her scent, will attract male cats from miles around. Removal of the ovaries will stop her estrus cycles.

When should I have my cat spayed?

Spaying should be performed before the first estrus or "heat cycle". Most cats are spayed between four and six months of age although some veterinarians choose to spay cats at two to three months of age.

What does a spay surgery 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 her 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 confirmation 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 her 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 your pet will be breathing on her 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 her 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 on the abdomen will be shaved 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 clipped hair may take 8–12 weeks or more to regrow.

All of the preparation is done in the "prep" area of the hospital and then your cat is then moved to the sterile surgery area where she will be placed on a cozy sheep skin blanket on a circulating warm water blanket that is temperature controlled. 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.

The operation is performed through a relatively small incision made most commonly in the midline of the abdomen, just below the umbilicus (belly button). Both ovaries are removed along with the entire uterus. The surgical incision will be closed with several layers of dissolvable sutures. These sutures will be placed below the skin and will not be visible. They will be dissolved by the body in 2–3 weeks. 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.

Once your cat is awake and able to walk, she 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. For the first 12–24 hours after surgery we can monitor food and water intake and provide an easily digestible cat food that will minimize intestinal irritation (sort of like the bland crackers and gingerale you might have after surgery). The morning following the surgery we will have the opportunity to monitor your cat's temperature, examine the incision and ensure your cat is prepared to go home. You will be provided with medication to give at home that will aid in your cat continuing to be pain free during her recovery.

Are complications common with spaying?

In general, complications are rare during an ovariohysterectomy surgery. However, as with any anesthetic or surgical procedure, there is always a small risk. The potential complications include:

Anesthetic reaction

Any individual cat can have an unexpected adverse reaction following the administration of any drug or anesthetic. Such cases are impossible to predict, but 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, it is important that all pre-operative instructions are strictly followed and that you report any signs of illness or previous medical conditions to your veterinarian prior to any sedation, anesthesia or surgery.

Post-operative infection

This may occur internally or externally around the incision site. In most cases, the infection can be controlled with antibiotics. A post-operative infection most commonly occurs when the cat licks the site excessively or is in a damp environment.

Suture Reaction or Sinus Formation

Although extremely rare, occasionally the body will react to certain types of suture material used during surgery. This results in a draining wound or tract that may appear up to several weeks after the surgery was performed. Often a further operation is required to remove the suture material.

** We are always happy to recheck your cat at any time if there is a concern about post-operative problems.

Will spaying have any adverse effects on my cat?

In the vast majority of cats, there are no adverse effects following an ovariohysterectomy. 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.

"Many myths and beliefs about spaying that are not supported by facts or research."

There are many myths and beliefs about spaying that are not supported by facts or research. Be sure to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your veterinarian prior to surgery.

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

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 her hospital stay?
6. Will my cat be hospitalized overnight? Why or why not.
7. Is preanesthetic blood work recommended to ensure safety under general anesthetic? If not recommended why not?
8. 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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