

Neutering of cats and dogs

Executive summary

BVA acknowledges that neutering is not a trivial procedure but the welfare implications of neutering are outweighed by the benefits. In addition, BVA believes that neutering should be performed with adequate anaesthesia and that pain relief should be given to an animal pre-emptively and post-operatively.

In line with the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA), BVA recommends that pet cats are neutered from 16 weeks. In the case of feral and rescue kittens it may be necessary to neuter earlier than 16 weeks (due to the age of trapping). In these circumstances, neutering at eight to 12 weeks is considered safe and appropriate compared with the harm for non-neutering.

BVA believes that there is no current scientific evidence to support the view that the spaying of bitches should take place after the first season. However, at the current time there is insufficient scientific data available to form a position on the early neutering of dogs and bitches.

Welfare benefits of neutering for cats

BVA agrees with BSAVA that the additional welfare benefits of neutering cats include:

- reduction in numbers of roaming cats injured or killed in road traffic accidents
- reduction in fighting, thus reduction in infected wounds, abscesses and spread of FIV infection

Welfare benefits of spaying for bitches

- No false pregnancy, which is common in bitches and can occur after each season. It can result in distress to the bitch and anguish to the owner. A bitch undergoing a false pregnancy may produce milk, lose her appetite and exhibit adverse behavioural problems.
- Pyometra and other uterine diseases are avoided - unspayed bitches can develop pyometra later in life, which then requires life-saving surgery. Spaying a healthy bitch does not involve the risks of spaying an older bitch with toxemia arising from the pyometra.
- Reduces risk of mammary tumours as the relative risk of mammary tumours increases progressively with each successive season. Bitches spayed before the second season have a lower prevalence of mammary tumours than entire bitches.
- No oestrus: oestrus (season or "heat") occurs about every six months in entire bitches. During this time bitches have to be kept away from other dogs and walked under close supervision.
- There are some reservations about spaying but most are not justified when examined more closely. Spaying may predispose to weight increase but dietary management can control this. Urinary incontinence can occasionally be associated with spaying but whether that relates to the age at which the bitch was spayed is unknown. Spaying is irreversible and a decision to spay a young bitch may be postponed by controlling her oestrus with drugs under veterinary direction. BVA believes the benefits of spaying a bitch outweigh any potential risks that are involved with the procedure.

Welfare benefits of castration for dogs

Castration rarely produces undesirable changes in temperament. Any weight change can be controlled by management of the diet. There is little problem with male guide dogs that are all castrated. Veterinary advice should always be sought on each individual case. Benefits of castration include:

- It limits straying, particularly in response to bitches in season, which causes nuisance and unwanted litters
- As a treatment for excessive and unacceptable sexual behaviour towards bitches, people and inanimate objects
- For medical reasons eg. to prevent or remove testicular tumours or reduce perianal adenoma or prostatic hyperplasia

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