

BVA policy position on Neutering of Cats and Dogs – Executive Summary

Introduction

Although commonly performed, neutering is not a trivial procedure and there are multiple clinical and contextual factors to consider before deciding when, how, and whether to neuter a cat or dog. The evidence base has changed since BVA previously considered this issue in 2019 and will continue to change as new research is published. This policy draws together the current key research, and includes guidance for vets in practice, to support decision making in relation to neutering.

Summary

The policy considers how, why and when a dog or cat should be neutered. It looks at the evidence for long-term health and welfare impacts of neutering, and how these could be mitigated by using different methods, delaying the operation, or perhaps not neutering at all. It also looks at the impact of the procedure itself in terms of surgical risk and recovery.

Neutering (or not) obviously has a direct impact on the animal or pregnancy, birth, and conditions of the testicle, uterus or ovaries. However, limiting exposure to gonadal hormones through neutering can also increase the incidence of mammary and orthopaedic conditions and, in some breeds of dog, this is more significant than in others and should be considered accordingly.

The policy considers the importance of an informed conversation with the owner, which considers all the available options in the context of the animal's and the owner's lifestyle. In addition to the impact on the animal itself, practicalities must be considered such as the impact of, or on, other animals in the household, and the consequences of an unexpected litter.

Conclusions

When to Neuter

The consensus is that **male and female cats** should be neutered at around 16 weeks unless they are intended for breeding, or there are clinical reasons not to neuter.

Spaying is generally recommended for **female dogs** due to the health and welfare issues around pregnancy and whelping, and prevalence of uterine and ovarian conditions later in life. Depending on the breed and expected age at maturity, female dogs should be **spayed between twelve and twenty-three months** of age unless they are intended for breeding. Spaying should be also considered for female dogs after breeding is finished to reduce the risk of health problems in later life.

The question of whether to castrate **male dogs** is more complex and should be considered case-by-case in the context of the breed and lifestyle of the dog. If the decision is made to neuter, castration of **male dogs**, either medical or surgical, should not be carried out before physical maturity for the breed, unless there is a compelling contextual reason for doing so.

How to Neuter

Careful discussion with the owner should take place to ensure the implications of neutering, and the various alternatives, are fully understood before a decision is taken to proceed.

The table below summarises various methods of neutering discussed in the policy. Please note that the GnRH agonist implant (deslorelin) is the only medical option currently licensed for use in the UK. Medical castration of post-pubertal male dogs may be considered in circumstances where surgical castration is not desirable.

Procedure	Definition	Suppresses fertility	Suppresses gonadal hormones
Medical or non-surgical neutering			
Temporary medical neutering	Reversible, temporary suppression of fertility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GnRH agonists, reproductive steroid hormones, GnRH vaccines 	Yes	Yes
Permanent medical (chemical) castration <i>*not licensed in the UK</i>	Irreversible suppression of fertility. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> intratesticular injection of zinc gluconate or calcium chlorate gene therapy 	Yes	Yes
Surgical neutering			
Surgical castration	Removal of both testicles	Yes	Yes
Vasectomy	Ligation or cutting of the vas deferens	Yes	No
Spay - ovari hysterectomy (OHE)	Removal of the ovaries and part, or all, of the uterus	Yes	Yes
Spay - ovariectomy (OE)	Removal of the ovaries only	Yes	Yes
Ovary-sparing spay (OSS) - hysterectomy	Removal of the uterus only	Yes	No
Fallopian tube ligation or salpingectomy* <i>*Referred to as fallopian tube surgery within this Policy</i>	Ligation or cutting of fallopian tubes	Yes	No

Areas where further research is needed

Given the complexities around neutering dogs, particularly males, a comprehensive resource is needed summarising the current evidence, evidence gaps, and risk factors of neutering for common dog breeds, to further assist vets in advising owners.

More research is needed into the impacts of neutering on male and female cats. There is very limited evidence on the health and welfare impacts of neutering, and the recommendation is based more on societal and population reasons. However research is complicated by the fact that the vast majority of owned cats are neutered as a matter of course.