



Feline Spay FAQ

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Spaying your cat is an important part of basic cat health care. Spaying at a young age prevents mammary cancer and spaying at any age prevents unwanted kittens, and noisy heat cycles. The following is a list of frequently asked questions.

What is actually removed during spaying?

Spaying is an "ovariohysterectomy," which means that both the ovaries and the uterus are removed. The cervix is tied off, leaving the vagina to end in a blind sac. Since it is the ovaries that are responsible for the heat cycles, possible mammary tumor development, and behavior problems, it is crucial that the ovaries be removed intact; some veterinarians will leave the uterus behind, though, it is generally regarded as best to remove the entire tract, uterus included.

How long will my cat stay in the hospital?

In most cases, our hospital prefers to send home surgery cases the same day. By doing this your pet will have supervision during the evening hours and be in a comfortable, stress-free environment. We encourage all owners to restrict their pet's activity during this time, however. Pain medication in the form of a tablet will be sent home with your pet; this medicine should be started the evening following surgery. No baths should be given until at least one week after surgery.

Will she have stitches?

At South Des Moines Veterinary Center, we prefer to close the incision with "buried" stitches which are internal. Incisions are closed with 2-3 layers of suture (stitches); the skin is closed with surgical glue. There will be no skin stitches.

What can I expect regarding recovery period/incision care?

Some of the more common post-operative complications of spaying include: swelling of the incision site (some cats may experience soreness or swelling near the incision if not confined to a small area) and/or inappetance. Food and water are generally given in small amounts until the next day or late that night and the cat should be kept quiet and not allowed outside.

Later in the recovery period, it is not unusual to notice swelling at the incision site. Cats often react this way to internal sutures and this kind of swelling is common and resolves spontaneously. Such swellings are firm and there is no fluid drainage or bleeding from the incision. They generally resolve in 3-4 weeks. Any fluid drainage from the incision is abnormal and the cat should be rechecked by a veterinarian.

What if she is in heat at the time of spay?

Some female cats are disruptively annoying when they are in heat; yowling and carrying on and they are spayed to end the heat quickly. Other cats are spayed in heat randomly when the owner does not realize that the cat is in heat. Either way the spay is slightly more difficult due to the engorgement of the tissues and larger blood vessels. Spaying in heat does not carry a significant risk to the cat but, since extra surgery time is frequently required, an extra charge will be incurred.

What if she is pregnant at the time of spay?

Spaying can be performed at any time during the course of pregnancy. Often, the owner is unaware that the cat is pregnant. If there is any question, make it clear to your veterinarian what your wishes are should your cat be found pregnant. Due to extra work and surgery time, most veterinarians will charge an extra fee for spaying a pregnant animal. At South Des Moines Veterinary Center, we are commonly asked what to do about newly adopted stray cats thought to be pregnant. As we work with numerous rescue groups we are keenly aware of the pet over-population problem. We encourage spaying of strays or newly adopted female cats regardless of pregnancy. There are simply too many kittens without homes as it is.

What's the difference between spaying in a hospital versus spaying in a low cost spay clinic?

Low cost spay/neuter facilities operate on a very tight budget. They have to in order to provide a low cost service and still be able to pay for supplies and staff. This means they use cheaper materials for suture and anesthesia, often have limited hours, and may not have state of the art monitoring equipment or capabilities in case of emergency. Probably most important is the fact that in order to stay in business, a low cost clinic must perform a high volume of surgeries each day. This limits the individual attention a patient can receive if an "assembly line" approach is used. Often these are the situations where only the ovaries are removed and the uterus is left behind so as to save time or where the entire spay is performed through a tiny incision only a half inch or so long so as to save time closing (and sacrifice inspection of the abdomen for bleeding. It is a good idea to know what one is paying for. ***We encourage you to stop by for a tour of our facility and to ask questions regarding pre-anesthetic exams, blood work, and anesthetic monitoring when inquiring on spay estimates.***

At South Des Moines Veterinary Center we provide pre-anesthetic examinations and blood work to ensure that your cat is healthy prior to surgery. We also have a dedicated technician that observes your cat throughout anesthesia. Advanced monitoring technology is also utilized during your pet's surgery (pulse oximetry, heart rate monitor, EKG, etc.). Fluid therapy is also available in cases where this procedure is warranted. South Des Moines Veterinary Center prides ourselves on our commitment to our patients not only during surgery, but post-operatively as well. Clients are always welcome to call with any questions they may have!

How long after having kittens can she be spayed?

The mammary (breast) development that comes with nursing can make the spay surgery more difficult. Ideally, a month after weaning allows for regression of this tissue and spaying can proceed. Unfortunately, it is possible for a female cat to become pregnant during this waiting period if her owner is not careful.

At what age can my cat be spayed?

The traditional age for spaying is 4-6 months. The last ten years has brought us a great deal of research into "early" spaying and we now know that there is no problem with spaying as early as 8 weeks of age. At South Des Moines Veterinary Center we like to spay our female patients when they weigh at least 3 to 4 pounds.

Will she get fat and lazy after spaying?

Estrogens have a natural appetite suppressing effect and the loss of estrogens may lead to an increased appetite. It is important to realize that estrogens only circulate in a female cat during her mating season. Behaviorally, she should not be any different (or hungrier) than her "Winter self."

Can she still come into heat after spaying?

Without ovaries, she should be unable to come into heat. Occasionally, a remnant of ovarian tissue is left behind by mistake. This can lead to some annoying behaviors as the female cat comes into heat (though she would be unable to get pregnant if her uterus has been removed as is customary with spaying). Special testing or even surgical exploration may be needed to determine if there is an ovarian remnant.

Once again, spaying is an important part of cat ownership. We recommend that all cats be spayed.

