



## Neutering female cats

### What are the advantages of neutering females?

The advantages include:

- Prevention of unwanted pregnancy
- Avoidance of seasons (which otherwise occur every 3 weeks, with cats calling and searching for a mate)
- Reduced risk of contracting FIV and FeLV - life-threatening viruses that are spread by mating
- Reduced risk of reproductive tumours

### What are the disadvantages of neutering females?

The disadvantages include:

- All anaesthetics and surgery carry some risk of complications
- Increased risk of weight gain (preventable by reducing food intake)

### So should I neuter my female cat?

The British Veterinary Association and Acorn House Veterinary Hospital strongly recommend the neutering of all female cats not intended for breeding.

### When should I neuter my female cat?

We recommend that female cats are neutered between 4 and 6 months of age.

### What does neutering involve?

Neutering females is also known as 'spaying'. It involves removing the ovaries and the womb.

Cats are given a pre-medication injection on arrival at the hospital. This makes them feel sleepy. They are then given a general anaesthetic and a patch of fur on the flank is clipped away. An incision is made on the flank through the skin, fat and muscle, into the abdominal cavity. The ovaries and cervix are identified. Loops of suture material (surgical thread) are used to tie off the blood supply to each ovary and the cervix. The ovaries and womb can then be removed. The muscle, fat and skin are stitched back up in separate layers. All cats receive injections of pain relief at the time of surgery.

### What are the risks of anaesthesia?

Studies have shown that the risk of death under anaesthetic in healthy cats in the UK is approximately 1 in 900. This risk is higher than for people undergoing anaesthesia.

Anaesthetic risks are minimised by careful management and monitoring of the patient's temperature, heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, carbon dioxide levels and reflexes throughout the procedure. Every anaesthetised patient at Acorn House has an intravenous cannula placed before anaesthesia (small tube into the vein on a front leg) and a tube placed into the windpipe as soon as they are asleep. Every patient receives intravenous fluids (a drip) and oxygen whilst they are under anaesthetic, and the cannula means that medication can be given straight into the blood stream in case of any complications.

### What are the risks of spay surgery?

Specific surgical complications that have been reported include:

- Hernia at the operation site. If cats are very active after surgery, the muscle may not heal properly and a small hernia may occur. This would appear as a soft swelling under the skin. If this occurs, a second surgery is required to repair the muscle.
- Interference with the wound. If cats lick at their wounds there is a risk of the wound opening up and becoming infected.
- Bleeding. The ovaries and cervix are supplied by blood vessels, which need to be tied off before the ovaries and cervix can be removed. If the ties slip after surgery, bleeding can occur. This is very rare, but if this complication happens, it will be necessary to back and tie a new tie around that vessel.
- Reaction of the body to the suture material internally (where the vessels are tied off) or under the skin. Fluid may be produced by the irritated tissues, so there may be a clear or pink discharge from the wound. In most cases, this will settle on its own over time as the suture material dissolves, but in exceptional cases it may be necessary to repeat the surgery and replace the suture material with an alternative.
- Damage to the urinary tract. The urinary system lies very close to the ovaries and womb and there are very rare reports of damage to this system at the time of surgery. The risk of this complication is very, very low.

### How does Acorn House Veterinary Hospital minimise the risk for my cat?

- The senior veterinary and nursing teams at Acorn House have additional qualifications and experience in medicine, critical care and surgery and have developed anaesthetic and surgical protocols to ensure that every pet that is neutered at Acorn House will receive the same high standard of care.
- Cats that have been spayed are kept at the hospital until the end of the day of surgery. This ensures that they can be monitored for early signs of problems, and are rested during this critical period of recovery.

## Aftercare

Cats usually go home the afternoon/evening of their operation. Cats have check-ups at the surgery 10 days after the operation.

A buster collar is provided free of charge, to prevent cats from licking at their wounds. Some clients prefer to purchase a medical bodysuit instead. These are available from Reception or our nursing team.

Most cats go home with a liquid anti-inflammatory painkiller, to be taken for 3-5 days after surgery. It is important to follow the instructions carefully - the medication should be given once daily, in food.

Cats need to be kept indoors until their sutures are removed at the 10 day check. Very active cats should be restricted in a single room or a recovery crate.

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