

# What is the Best Age to Spay/Neuter Your Pet?

It Depends...



Determining the best time to spay/neuter your pet is a complicated issue, especially in large/giant breed dogs.

Spay ([ovariohysterectomy or ovariectomy](#)) is the surgical sterilization procedure performed on females. [Castration](#) is the surgical sterilization procedure performed on males.

Aside from controlling the pet population, data suggests **most dogs** would benefit from waiting until **at least 6 months or older** (11-24 months) to [spay](#) or [neuter](#). The benefits of waiting become much more important for [large and giant breeds](#). Timing of [spay](#) or [neuter](#) for cats has not shown any increased benefit of waiting >6 months.

All Intact females are at risk for [pyometra](#), a debilitating uterine infection making pets very sick and sometimes resulting in death. A pyometra also makes a spay a riskier and more complex emergency procedure. [Mammary cancer](#) risk goes up significantly with the first and additional heat cycles for dogs and [cats](#). Intact females also are more likely to be harassed by intact males during times of heat, and can become [pregnant](#).

Neutering male [cats](#) and [dogs](#) can decrease risk of aggression, roaming, and incidence of [prostate disease](#), [perianal tumors](#), [perianal hernias](#), and [testicular cancer](#).

Most cats, small and medium sized dogs can be altered at  $\geq 6$  months of age. Allowing the patient to be more mature for anesthesia, but before going through sexual maturity (some small pets can go into heat as early as 6 months old). By 6 months, most pets have also lost their baby teeth and their adult teeth have erupted, so if there are any retained baby teeth we can address while under anesthesia for the

spay/neuter. There does not appear to be any increased risk for joint disease or cancers in small pets with alteration at 6 months.

Large/giant breed dogs require additional consideration. There are differing opinions and various studies suggesting delayed spay/neuter to  $\geq 1$  year of age or skeletal maturity MAY reduce joint disorders prevalence and/or certain cancer types (although still increased risk of mammary cancer). These studies are not perfect because they may evaluate only one specific breed, or may show diminishing returns after 1 year of age, or don't track disease past 8 years of age, so the debate continues. For males, waiting a little longer seems reasonable, but for females, considering an in-heat female pet in the home may become important for some.

In addition, it's important to address your pet's specific personality and your family's lifestyle. Your opinions about behaviors such as aggression, mounting, marking, and heat cycles are taken into consideration. How social you would like your dog to be needs to also be considered - as many daycares require spay/neuter prior to participation.

**For additional information, please visit:**

- ❖ [Proposed Ages for Sterilization](#), [Reproductive Health](#), & [Concepts to Consider](#) written by **AAHA** (The American Animal Hospital Association)
- ❖ [What is the Best Age to Spay/Neuter Your Dog?](#) Written by the **AKC Canine Health Foundation**.
- ❖ [Veterinary Partner](#) powered by the [Veterinary Information Network](#) (VIN)

For some of the most recent research read the following article links published in the **Frontiers of Veterinary Science Journal**

- ❖ **PUREBRED DOGS**
  - [Assisting Decision-Making on Age of Neutering for 35 Breeds of Dogs: Associated Joint Disorders, Cancers, and Urinary Incontinence](#)
- ❖ **MIXED BREED DOGS**
  - [Assisting Decision-Making on Age of Neutering for Mixed Breed Dogs of Five Weight Categories: Associated Joint Disorders and Cancers](#)

For additional questions on this very important topic, please reach out to your veterinarian and schedule a consultation. Additional consultation charges may apply.