



VETERINARY IRELAND

POLICY DOCUMENT
ON
CAT NEUTERING
2017

AS RATIFIED BY THE
VETERINARY IRELAND NATIONAL COUNCIL
6th September 2017



Veterinary Ireland Policy Document on Cat Neutering

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Veterinary Ireland Policy on Cat Neutering



Summary:

1. Veterinary Ireland recommends that pet cats are neutered from 16 weeks of age once they are in good health.
2. Veterinary Ireland supports the neutering of feral and rescue cats from the age of 8 weeks, where there may not be an opportunity to neuter these cats at a later stage, and where there are no concomitant health issues.

Background:

Veterinary Ireland strongly supports the neutering of cats as an essential part of responsible cat ownership. From the perspective of population control it is vital to neuter cats before they are sexually active. Neutering will prevent the birth of unwanted kittens and reduce the stray cat population. This will limit the perpetuation of many diseases which are found amongst the feral cat population, and are spread to the domestic cat population through fighting and sexual activity e.g. Feline Immunodeficiency Virus(FIV) and Feline Leukaemia Virus(FeLV). In addition, shedding of the protozoan parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*, by unwanted kittens is a public health concern. Many unwanted kittens suffer from poor health and die at a young age, due to the effects of their illnesses and/or starvation, or attack by predators.

Neutering Facts:

- Cats can start breeding from 4 months of age.
- The gestation period is 9 weeks and a female cat can come into season again 6 weeks after giving birth.
- Female cats can begin coming into heat from 16 weeks of age and can often have three litters in one year producing 5/6 kittens each time. 18 homes need to be found for each of these kittens each year!
- 1 unneutered female cat can be responsible for 20,000 descendants in just 5 years.
- Kittens can be safely neutered before 6 months of age. There is no scientific evidence to justify perceived risks of early neutering.
- Cats will readily breed with their brothers, sisters and parents.
- It is not beneficial for a cat to have a season or just one litter before being spayed.
- Neutering can be performed even if the female cat is in season, pregnant or lactating. This can be discussed with your vet.

Veterinary Ireland recommends that pet cats are neutered from 16 weeks of age once they are in good health. This should prevent any unwanted litters.

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Early neutering:

Advantages:

1. Prevents unwanted pregnancies.
2. Prevents the spread of disease e.g. FIV and FeLV.
3. Prevents pyometra, a serious infection of the womb in female cats.
4. Prevents some cancers;
 - i. Male: (testicular tumours) and infections
 - ii. Female: uterine, ovarian and mammary tumours
5. Reduces incidence of infected wounds and abscesses, caused by fighting.
6. Behavioural benefits - reduces straying, aggression, spraying, stress and calling/wailing in females during the breeding season (every three weeks from January to August) to attract a mate until they become pregnant.
7. As the sexual organs are relatively underdeveloped they have a reduced blood supply and as a result the risk of haemorrhage due to surgery is reduced.
8. Eliminates the need to find homes for unwanted litters and leads to better animal welfare for all cats.

Disadvantages:

1. Neutered cats may be prone to excessive weight gain.
2. Due to the reduced size of the structures involved it may be more challenging to ensure both ovaries are completely removed to prevent ovarian remnant syndrome.

In rescue and feral situations neutering before 16 weeks (8 – 12 weeks) is often strongly advisable and may present the only opportunity to neuter these cats. There is no scientific evidence to indicate that neutering from eight weeks onwards is deleterious. This is considered safe and appropriate by many international veterinary organisations.

Surgery:

Veterinary Ireland acknowledges that any surgery has inherent risks. However, the benefits of early neutering outweigh the harms in terms of prevention of unwanted cats and limitation of the spread of disease in the cat population. There is no scientific data available regarding the most appropriate weight of the cat but some rescue organisations have adopted 400 grams as the minimum weight at which they will neuter. Surgery should always be performed with appropriate anaesthesia and pain relief. Pre-emptive and multimodal analgesia is advised and use of an alpha 2 agonist as part of the pre-medication regime will aid pain relief. The addition of an opioid such as buprenorphine and an NSAID is advisable to provide excellent analgesia. In regard to younger kittens it is essential that a paediatric anaesthesia and pain relief protocol is used as appropriate. There is some early evidence to indicate that a midline incision may be less painful than a flank incision and studies have shown that the flank spay is not necessarily quicker than a midline incision. The experience of the surgeon will have a significant influence on the outcome of both these measures.

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Recommendations:

1. Veterinary Ireland recommends that pet cats are neutered from 16 weeks of age once they are in good health.
2. Veterinary Ireland supports the neutering of feral and rescue cats from the age of 8 weeks, where there may not be an opportunity to neuter these cats at a later stage, and where there are no concomitant health issues.

References

Coe RJ, Grint NJ, Tivers MS, Hotston Moore A, Holt PE. Comparison of flank and midline approaches to the ovariohysterectomy of cats. *Vet Rec* 2006; **159**: 309–13.

Bibliography

The Cat Group UK
BSAVA
BVA
International Society of Feline Medicine
Cats Protection



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