



## ***University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Sydney***

Faculty of Veterinary Science

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## **Desexing**

Welcome to University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Sydney. We operate a state of the art veterinary teaching hospital that treats both referral and first opinion cases. As part of our service we also operate a Desexing Clinic, which is responsible for the surgical sterilization of dogs and cats.

### **Why should I have my cat or dog desexed?**

We suggest desexing of all dogs and cats kept for non-breeding purposes. Besides the obvious reasons of permanently preventing unwanted litters of puppies and kittens, sterilization has many other health benefits. In male dogs, castration reduces the likelihood of prostate disease, testicular cancer and aggression towards other dogs. In male cats, castration reduces urine spraying and odour and aggression towards other cats. In female dogs and cats, spaying prevents the development of womb infections (pyometra) and reduces the risk of breast cancer.

### **What is the best age for desexing?**

In most cases it is best to perform desexing before puberty. This generally occurs at about 6 months of age (although it can happen between 4 and 9 months). We generally recommend desexing at 6 months of age once all vaccinations have been completed.

### **What does the procedure involve?**

In the case of male animals both testicles are removed via a skin incision. In male cats these are two skin incisions made in the scrotum, which are generally left open to heal naturally. In male dogs there is usually a single skin incision made just in front of the scrotum, which is stitched closed.

In female cats and dogs an incision is made through the skin of the belly. The belly cavity (abdomen) is entered through a deeper incision in the muscle. The ovaries and uterus are removed through this incision, which is then stitched closed.

### **What are the risks associated with surgery?**

The main risks associated with surgery are the risks associated with the anaesthetic and the risks associated with the procedure. Most of the animals coming in for desexing are young and healthy and in the lowest anaesthetic risk category. In addition the anaesthetic is closely monitored by a veterinary anaesthetist throughout the procedure. Although we cannot eliminate all risk, we minimize it as much as we are able.

The main risk associated with surgery is haemorrhage (bleeding) during the procedure. This is because we need to cut through some large blood vessels in order to perform the operation. Generally we are aware of bleeding during the procedure and can correct it, but occasionally bleeding can occur post operatively.

The day after surgery, there is often some bruising and tenderness associated with the wounds for which we can give pain relief in hospital. Many dogs will also go home with a short course of pain relief tablets. If you feel your pet is experiencing pain at home, then please get in contact with us. Occasionally there can be a "clipper rash" where the hair has been removed prior to surgery. Usually this develops soon after surgery and we sometimes apply a cortisone cream to this area.

After surgery problems with infection may arise, reactions to stitch material, breakage of the internal stitches and removal of the stitches by your pet. Although we perform all our surgery under sterile conditions we cannot guarantee against the development of wound infections. We do not routinely give antibiotics after surgery, but these may be required (at a cost) if an infection develops. Reactions to stitch material do occur and can cause some swelling of the wound. Generally this swelling gradually decreases over a period of 1 - 2 weeks and we just need to monitor the situation. Breakage of the internal stitch material in the muscle layer of female dogs and cats happens very occasionally but can be a very serious problem. If the internal stitches break it can allow the intestines to pass through the skin wound with disastrous consequences. Usually this problem develops from overactivity immediately after the surgery. We check all wounds for swelling before your pet goes home. If your pet breaks the stitch material after it has been discharged from our care, then you will be responsible for the costs of correcting the problem. Please follow the advice regarding activity to prevent this from happening! Again we monitor your pet in here for self removal of skin sutures. If your pet requires replacement of these stitches because it has been pulled them out at home, then again you will be responsible for the cost associated with replacing them.

### **What problems can develop after desexing?**

Desexing tends to reduce the metabolic rate, which means desexed animals are more prone to obesity **unless** measures are taken to avoid this. Once the stitches have been removed we generally recommend a slight (10 - 20%) reduction in the amount of food being fed to help compensate for this. We recommend regular "weigh-ins" to make sure your pet is not gaining weight and can give advice if this seems to be occurring.

Some female dogs become urinary incontinent after desexing and will "leak" urine particularly when they are lying down. Normally this happens later on in life although sometimes it can happen soon after desexing. In general this problem can be managed with medication, although in a few cases surgery may be required.

### **My pet is in heat. Can it be desexed?**

In general we prefer not to desex female animals that are in heat. This is because the uterus has an increased blood supply, is more fragile and there is a higher risk of haemorrhage. It is better to wait 2 - 3 weeks until after the heat has finished before booking them in for desexing.

### **My pet has recently had kittens/puppies. When can I have her desexed?**

We usually recommend desexing once the puppies or kittens have been weaned, the milk has dried up and the breasts have returned to normal size.

### **I have been told my pet has a retained testicle, what does this mean?**

The testicles develop inside the body close to the kidneys and descend through the groin area and into the scrotum soon after birth. Occasionally a testicle becomes "lost" along this route. If the testicle remains outside the scrotum there is a much higher risk of it becoming cancerous. Generally if the testicles have not descended into the scrotum by the age of six months, then they are highly unlikely to do so and surgery is necessary.

Sometimes we can see the retained testicle under the skin in the groin area, but in other situations we may use ultrasound to locate the missing testicle(s). This enables us to plan our surgical approach more effectively. In most cases two separate incisions are required to remove both testicles, resulting in an extended surgical time and unfortunately greater cost!

### **I would like to have my pet desexed. How do I make a booking and what do I need to do beforehand?**

The Desexing Clinic takes place each Monday and a booking is required. In order to make a booking you will need to phone our reception staff on 9351 3437. They will make an appointment for you early on a Monday morning. They will confirm the price of desexing and send you a copy of this leaflet. Full payment of the cost of the procedure is expected prior to discharge of your pet. We require that your pet is up to date with vaccinations prior to desexing. This ensures the safety of your pet and others in the hospital.

Pets need to be fasted from 8.00pm on Sunday evening prior to their surgery. This means that all food should be removed from your pet's vicinity. They can have water overnight, but this should be removed first thing in the morning.

**I would like to have my pet desexed, what happens when I arrive at the clinic?**

Pets are admitted between 8.00am and 8.30am on a Monday. We try to space the admissions out during this time, but please be patient as sometimes everyone arrives at once! On admission a Veterinary Intern will ask you a series of questions to gather information about your pet's general health status and previous medical problems. They will then examine your pet before consulting with one of the attending veterinarians. The veterinarian may then ask you further questions, before examining and admitting your dog or cat.

Once your pet is admitted it will have a small blood sample taken to assess health prior to a general anaesthetic. Your pet is examined by a veterinary anaesthetist who decides upon the safest type of anaesthetic to use. Your pet is then scheduled for surgery later on in the day. Prior to surgery the hair is clipped off the belly area and the skin is sterilized.

Surgery is performed by the veterinarian in conjunction with the veterinary intern (student) assigned to your pet. There is a fully qualified and experienced veterinarian in attendance at all times during the surgery. During the procedure your pet is constantly monitored by a veterinary anaesthetist. Each animal is given intravenous fluids to help support blood pressure together with morphine type pain relief.

Following surgery your pet is placed into the climate controlled recovery ward where it is monitored until awake from the anaesthetic. Following recovery your pet is admitted to the general ward where it is monitored overnight until discharge the following day (except for cat castrations, which generally go home the same evening). During this time your pet is checked regularly and receives ongoing pain relief as required.

**How do I care for my pet, once they come home?**

Your pet may be a little less active than normal with a slightly reduced appetite for the first 1 - 2 days after surgery. It is important to keep them in a warm, secure area during this time, preferably inside. Please feed them as normal. Please do not wash or bathe your pet until the skin stitches are removed. This is generally 10 - 14 days after surgery.

It is important to prevent your pet from biting or licking at the stitches. When your animal has been hospitalized in here after surgery, we will observe them for signs of wound irritation and if necessary fit them with an Elizabethan collar (like a bucket over the head). If you observe your pet worrying the wound at home, please obtain an Elizabethan collar from us. Please check the wound daily. If it becomes swollen, seems to be sore or has any discharge, then please bring your pet in for a recheck.

Exercise should be restricted until the skin stitches are removed. In particular activities that involved jumping up should be avoided as this puts a lot of tension on the wound, can result in the internal stitches breaking and require further surgery to correct. Dogs may be walked on a leash for up to 10 minutes twice daily.

***We hope this information leaflet has answered your questions regarding desexing at the University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Sydney. If you have any further questions, then please do not hesitate to contact us on 9351-3437.***