



Spaying/Neutering Recommendations

At Bunny Brigade South Carolina, we strive to educate rabbit owners about the benefits of spaying or neutering pet rabbits and the risks that are associated with declining these procedures.

Bunny Brigade South Carolina rescues and rehabilitates the most high-risk rabbits. Many of these rabbits have been dumped or abandoned by their previous owners due to accidental mating and pregnancy. Unfortunately, we are unable to take in every abandoned rabbit that needs our help as each rabbit that we rescue requires resources such as hay, pellets, housing, litter, etc. While we would love to rescue every rabbit that needs our help, it is simply unattainable due to the financial and time commitment required by each additional rabbit that we take in.

Population control is an essential step in decreasing the number of homeless and abandoned young rabbits that need to be rescued. Spaying or neutering your pet rabbit is a simple but effective way to contribute to the decrease in accidental pregnancies of domestic rabbits which will also decrease the homeless domestic rabbit population.

Many rabbit owners are hesitant to have their pet rabbit spayed or neutered. This document is intended to educate rabbit owners on the benefits of sterilization procedures and to highlight the potential risks associated with leaving a pet rabbit intact.

Rabbit Pregnancy Facts:

- Rabbits are sexually mature by 4-6 months of age
- A rabbit's gestational length (length of pregnancy) is about 30-33 days
- Rabbits are "induced ovulators" – this means that rabbits can become pregnant at essentially any time (right after giving birth, while nursing, etc.)
- A female rabbit can have up to 12 litters per year – with an average litter size of 7, this means that an unspayed rabbit could have up to 94 babies per year

Why should I spay or neuter my rabbit?

Rabbits that are spayed or neutered often make much better pets than rabbits that are unaltered (not "fixed"). Unaltered rabbits are typically much more difficult to litter box train or bond with other rabbits.

Additionally, unaltered rabbits commonly display behaviors such as moutning, spraying, attacking, biting, or marking. Rabbits that have been spayed or neutered are typically much friendlier and are able to "bond" to other rabbits of the same or opposite sex due to decreased aggression and territorial behaviors.

While many rabbit owners believe that population control is the only reason to spay or neuter their pet rabbit, this is simply not the case. Spaying and neutering your pet rabbit has many health benefits and leaving your pet rabbit intact can greatly increase their risk for serious health problems.

Health Considerations (Female):

Cancer:

Spaying your female rabbit is a critical step in the prevention of serious health conditions such as uterine cancer. Studies show that approximately 70-80% of unspayed female rabbits will be diagnosed with uterine adenocarcinoma (uterine cancer) by the age of four. Uterine adenocarcinoma is the most common type of cancer found in unaltered female rabbits and symptoms include bloody urine, unusual vaginal discharge, lethargy, and mammary cysts. While the cancer originates in the reproductive tract, it can easily spread to other areas of the body such as the lungs and brain.

The typical treatment for uterine adenocarcinoma is to spay the rabbit. If the disease is caught early, spaying the affected rabbit may remove all of the cancer. However, uterine adenocarcinoma has a very high rate of metastasis and generally has a poor prognosis. The best "treatment" for uterine adenocarcinoma is PREVENTION!

Spaying your rabbit between 6 months and 12 months of age greatly reduces their risk of developing life-threatening uterine cancer.

Pyometra:

Pyometra is a severe infection of the uterus that is often accompanied by intense inflammation and pus in the uterus.

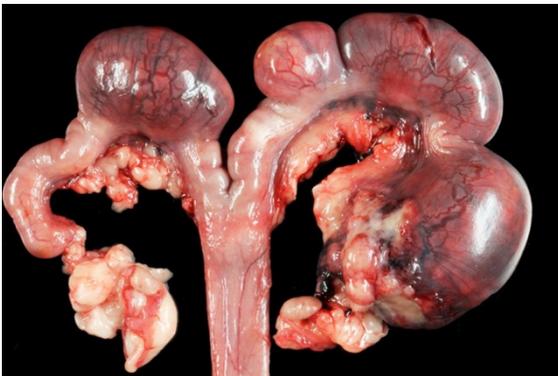
Symptoms of pyometra in unspayed female rabbits are generally non-specific (lethargy, decreased appetite, excess urination) which make it extremely difficult to detect a Pyometra early. Pyometra is a medical emergency and requires immediate surgical intervention in which the rabbit will be spayed in order to remove the infection. Many rabbits will not survive this emergency surgery as infection is often advanced and widespread by the time the condition is detected and diagnosed. Rabbits that do survive surgery will have a long recovery and they typically require additional support such as IV fluid therapy and aggressive antibiotics.

Normal Rabbit Uterus:



Image from http://www.medirabbit.com/EN/Uro_gen_diseases/Fem_rabbit/Fem_en.htm

Uterine Adenocarcinoma:



Images from Twitter account of Veterinary Pathologist Dr. Edouard Reyes-Gomez

Pyometra:



Image from <https://www.vetstream.com/treat/lapis/freeform/pyometra>

Health Considerations (Males):

Cancer:

Although less common, unaltered male rabbits can develop testicular cancer. The most common symptom of testicular cancer is enlarged or firm testicles. If detected early, neutering the male rabbit usually removes all of the cancer. However, testicular cancer has the potential to spread to other locations such as the lungs, which can lead to further complications and poorer prognosis.

Normal Testicles:



Image from <https://www.backyardchickens.com/threads/how-to-determine-rabbit-gender-with-pictures.911906/>

Testicular Cancer:



Image from <https://wacvet.ca/services/chemotherapy-and-cancer-treatment/>

Spaying and neutering your pet rabbit is the only way to contribute to population control while decreasing their risk for serious and potentially life-threatening health conditions. Bunny Brigade South Carolina recommends that your rabbit be spayed or neutered by a rabbit savvy-veterinarian. Females are typically spayed around 6 months of age while males can be neutered earlier at around 3-4 months of age, but these ages may vary depending on the veterinarian performing the procedure. We suggest consulting with your rabbit-savvy veterinarian to get their recommendation regarding what age your pet should be spayed or neutered. Your veterinarian will explain the pre-operative and post-operative instructions to you to ensure that your rabbit has the smoothest and fastest recovery possible.

If you need help finding a rabbit-savvy veterinarian in your area or if you have additional questions regarding these procedures, please feel free to reach out to Bunny Brigade South Carolina at bunnybrigadesc@gmail.com or through our Facebook page (Bunny Brigade Sc, Inc.)

References:

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