

Spaying and Neutering Pet Rabbits

Should I Have My Rabbit “Fixed?”

In most cases, the answer is an unqualified YES. If you are not planning to breed your rabbit, then spaying or neutering will extend your pet’s lifespan and make your rabbit a better companion for you.

- **Spaying/neutering eliminates the risk of unwanted pregnancy.**

Mistakes in identifying the sex of rabbits can be made in multi-rabbit households and unwanted pregnancies can occur. Spaying also reduces the risk of false or pseudopregnancy in females, which can cause undesirable behavior like nesting or digging.

- **Spaying reduces the risk of uterine cancer** and other reproductive diseases.

Adult, intact (or non-spayed) female rabbits are at high risk for uterine cancer. Depending on the breed, the incidence of uterine cancer can be as high as 60%.

- **Spaying/neutering improves the “pet quality” of your rabbit.**

When rabbits reach sexual maturity, they can become territorial, aggressive, and destructive. These changes make the pet rabbit harder to handle, harder to litter train, and male rabbits are also more likely to spray urine.

Most rabbit breeds reach sexual maturity between 4 to 6 months of age. Having your pet rabbit spayed or neutered at 5 or 6 months will greatly reduce undesirable behaviors, making your rabbit a better companion. (The risk of uterine cancer increases greatly after 2 years; so all rabbits should be spayed before this time).

How Should I Prepare My Rabbit For Surgery?

The most important preparation for surgery is to NOT change your rabbit’s routine in any way.

- Do NOT withhold food from your rabbit prior to surgery.

Unlike dogs and cats, rabbits cannot vomit so there is minimal risk of aspiration into the lungs during anesthesia. It is more dangerous to empty the digestive tract, which greatly increases the risk of gastrointestinal stasis, a very serious and potentially fatal problem, after surgery.

- Do NOT change your rabbit's diet.
- DO bring your rabbit's normal food and favorite treats to the hospital.
- DO minimize stress in your rabbit.

ALWAYS check with you're your veterinarian beforehand, but if your rabbit is bonded to another rabbit you MAY want to bring the friend to the hospital as well. Separation can be traumatic and stressful before surgery. After surgery, the friends can be kept separate, where the rabbits can see and smell each other. Reunite the rabbits after healing.

How Do I Care For My Rabbit After Surgery?

- Keep your rabbit quiet and limit her ability to run or jump.
- Handle your rabbit with care. Lift and carry her the correct way: supporting the entire body and controlling the back legs. If you are unsure, ask veterinary hospital staff to demonstrate the best way to lift and carry your pet.
- Make sure your rabbit has plenty of water and her favorite foods like leafy greens, hay, and herbs.
- Monitor your rabbit's appetite, water intake, and fecal output closely. If your rabbit's appetite slows or stops, or if any other problems arise, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Monitor your rabbit for signs of pain such as:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Hunched appearance
 - Reluctance to move
 - Sluggishness, depression
 - Loud teeth grinding
 - Grunting or crying
- Check the incision site each morning and evening. Some redness and swelling is normal after surgery, but if redness or swelling persists or increases contact your veterinarian immediately.

Additional, sperm can survive in the male rabbit's 'tubing' for up to 4 weeks. Therefore males should be kept away from intact (non-spayed) females for this length of time minimum.

Resources

Carnohan K. A client handout on rabbit spay/neuter. Exotic Animal Medicine rotation 6. 2005.

Harriman M. House Rabbit Handbook: How to Live with an Urban Rabbit, 3rd ed. Alameda: Drollery Press; 2005.

House Rabbit Society www.rabbit.org