

# Facts about Cat & Dog Overpopulation

- “No homes for littermates” is one of the top 10 reasons people relinquish their cats and dogs to shelters.<sup>2</sup>
- The top reason both cat and dog guardians give for not having their pet altered is that they simply have not bothered to do it yet.<sup>3</sup>
- Twenty percent of cat guardians think their cat is too young to be altered, and 18% say they are not able to afford spay/neuter surgery.<sup>3</sup>
- Twenty-one percent of dog guardians want to breed their dog, and 13% think their dog is too young to be altered.<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated three to four million cats and dogs are euthanized in shelters each year.<sup>1</sup> That’s one every eight seconds.
- Tens of millions<sup>4</sup> of stray and feral cats struggle to survive on their own outdoors. Although some are altered and live in managed colonies, most are not altered and receive no health care. They reproduce at will and many suffer from illness or injury before dying.<sup>5</sup>
- Over half (56%) of dog guardians and nearly two-thirds (63%) of cat guardians rank pet overpopulation as the most important pet issue.<sup>3</sup>
- In a study of relinquishment of cats and dogs in 12 U.S. animal shelters, 30% of the surrendered dogs were purebreds.<sup>6</sup>
- The same study indicated that 55% of the surrendered dogs and 47% of the surrendered cats were unaltered.<sup>6</sup>
- It costs U.S. taxpayers an estimated \$2 billion each year to round up, house, euthanize, and dispose of homeless animals.<sup>7</sup>
- Over 56% of dogs and puppies entering shelters are euthanized, based on reports from over 1,055 facilities across America.<sup>8</sup>
- Approximately 71% of cats and kittens entering shelters are euthanized, based on reports from 1,055 facilities across America.<sup>8</sup>

1 *HSUS Pet Overpopulation Estimates.*  
[www.hsus.org/pets/issues\\_affecting\\_our\\_pets/pet\\_overpopulation\\_and\\_ownership\\_statistics/hsus\\_pet\\_overpopulation\\_estimates.html](http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/pet_overpopulation_and_ownership_statistics/hsus_pet_overpopulation_estimates.html)

2 National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy—*The Top Ten Reasons for Pet Relinquishment to Shelters in the United States.* [www.petpopulation.org/topten.html](http://www.petpopulation.org/topten.html)

3 *The State of the American Pet—A Study Among Pet Owners.* Prepared by Yankelovich Partners for Ralston Purina, October 2000. [www.purina.ca/images/articles/pdf/TheStateofThe.pdf](http://www.purina.ca/images/articles/pdf/TheStateofThe.pdf)

4 Alley Cat Allies. [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org)

5 Alley Cat Rescue. [www.saveacat.org](http://www.saveacat.org)

6 *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 1998, Volume 1, Number 3, p. 213

7 *USA Today*, June 23, 1998, pg. 1

8 National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy—*Shelter Statistics Survey* (1997 data). [www.petpopulation.org/statsurvey.html](http://www.petpopulation.org/statsurvey.html)

## **Q: What is spaying and neutering?**

Spaying and neutering, the most common surgical procedures performed on animals, stop animals from being able to reproduce. Females are spayed, and males are neutered (although sometimes the word “neuter” is used to refer to an animal of unknown sex, or to a group of animals of mixed or unknown sex).

The clinical name for “spay” is ovariohysterectomy. When a female is spayed, her ovaries and uterus are removed. The clinical name for “neuter” is orchidectomy. When a male is neutered, his testicles are removed.

## **Q: Isn't spaying and neutering unnatural?**

Euthanizing healthy, adoptable companion animals is unnatural. Currently, we euthanize one kitten, cat, puppy, or dog about every 8 seconds due to a critical lack of resources, including loving, lifetime homes. Spay/neuter is a humane, proven solution to this tragic human failure.

## **Q: Doesn't spaying and neutering hurt?**

Veterinarians provide animals with a general anesthetic, so the surgery itself is painless. Any discomfort an animal experiences afterward is minimal, and can be alleviated with medication given to you by your vet. According to VetCentric.com, “most cats will heal very easily and quickly,” and “most dogs show no signs of discomfort from the procedure.” In fact, some animals “may attempt to resume their normal level of activity immediately after surgery.” This, of course, should be monitored to ensure that the animal does not aggravate the incision. Most animals return to normal activity within 24 to 72 hours after surgery.

## **Q: Does spaying or neutering provide any additional benefits?**

Yes. Spaying greatly reduces the risk of breast cancer and prevents various reproductive tract disorders. Neutering often resolves undesirable behaviors such as aggression, spraying, and roaming, and eliminates the risk of various testicular diseases. Generally, animals who have been spayed or neutered prove to be more sociable companions.

## **Q: Doesn't spaying or neutering make dogs less protective?**

No. Any changes brought about by spaying or neutering are generally positive. Neutered males tend to fight less and are less likely to become lost due to straying from home in search of a mate. Spayed females do not go into heat or need to be confined indoors to avoid pregnancy. Dogs do not become less protective or loyal to their guardians as a result of being spayed or neutered.

## **Q: Is it really necessary to neuter males? Males don't give birth!**

The old saying “it takes two to tango” is as true for animals as it is for humans. Even if you are very careful to keep your male pet under control at all times, accidents do happen and he may escape. In fact, he will likely try repeatedly to escape, digging up your yard, scratching up your door, or chewing off his restraint in the process. Males roaming in search of a mate are susceptible to being injured by traffic and in fights with other males. And while a female cat or dog can only have one litter at a time, male animals can impregnate many females each day.

## **Q: When should I have my pet spayed or neutered?**

As early as possible! Although cats and dogs have traditionally been altered at six months, many veterinarians are now practicing pediatric (also known as “early age,” “prepubertal,” or “juvenile”) spay/neuter surgery, which can be performed on animals who weigh at least two pounds—typically at six to eight weeks of age. Doctors practicing this technique report that the surgery is significantly easier and quicker to perform; guardians who have had pediatric spay/neuter performed on their animals report fewer medical problems than those who have older animals altered; and spaying or neutering homeless animals before adopting them out is the best way to prevent accidental births. If your veterinarian would like more information on pediatric spay/neuter, please refer her or him to the list of resources on page 28.

**Q: Isn't spaying and neutering expensive?**

Although to some animal guardians the cost of surgery may seem high initially, it's a real bargain when compared with the cost of raising a litter of puppies or kittens. Spaying and neutering also saves tax dollars. A 1999 survey of 186 shelters revealed an average cost of \$176 to handle each homeless animal<sup>2</sup>—a cost that ultimately comes out of all our pockets. Most important of all, when you consider the moral expense of euthanizing millions of healthy, innocent beings whom many of us consider “best friends,” the cost of spay/neuter surgery fades to insignificance.

While prices for spay/neuter surgery vary considerably, many humane societies, welfare organizations, and municipal animal care and control departments will spay/neuter animals at low costs for people who truly need them—those struggling to make ends meet on a low income, animal rescue workers such as those who trap and neuter feral cats, and Good Samaritans who are paying for someone else's animal(s). Friends of Animals, for example, distributes low cost spay/neuter vouchers through its national toll-free hotline: 1-800-321-PETS (1-800-321-7387). Other resources are listed here: [Humanesociety.org/spayday](http://Humanesociety.org/spayday)

You can also start a low cost spay/neuter program in your community. The resources listed on pages 28-29 provide all the information you need to get started.

The bottom line is this: when you bring an animal into your family, you assume responsibility for that animal's wellbeing. Spaying or neutering is as vital to your pet's health and happiness as routine physical examinations, good nutrition, grooming, playtime, and love. Before you adopt an animal, you need to seriously consider whether or not you are ready to take on the financial responsibility of properly caring for one. If you have already adopted an unaltered animal, it is your responsibility to have that animal spayed or neutered regardless of cost.

**Q: I've been feeding a group of stray or feral cats, and they are reproducing. What should I do?**

It is important to humanely trap the cats and have them spayed or neutered as soon as possible. Please refer to the list of feral, stray, and domestic cat resources on page 28. The organizations listed here can provide step-by-step instruction and expert guidance to ensure your Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) effort is a rewarding success.

**Q: Are there any special considerations to take into account when having animal companions other than cats and dogs spayed or neutered?**

Yes. It is vital that rabbit, ferret, guinea pig, and rodent spay/neuters be performed by veterinarians who have experience with operating on these particular animals. Please refer to the list of resources on page 29.

- Have kids play Spay Now! Created by two pre-teen girls, Spay Now! is a free online game that teaches kids about the importance of spay/neuter in a fun way. Available here: [www.nchumane.org/games/spaynow/index.html](http://www.nchumane.org/games/spaynow/index.html)

**References**

<sup>1</sup>*The State of the American Pet—A Study Among Pet Owners*. Prepared by Yankelovich Partners for Ralston-Purina, October 2000. [www.purina.ca/images/articles/pdf/TheStateofThe.pdf](http://www.purina.ca/images/articles/pdf/TheStateofThe.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Wenstrup, John, and Alexis Dowidchuk, “Pet Overpopulation: Data and Measurement Issues in Shelters,” *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 2(4), 1999, 303-319.

According to a recent survey<sup>1</sup>, almost one quarter of America's animal guardians have not spayed or neutered their pets. Why not?

- “Haven't bothered to do it yet.” (29%) Spay Day USA is the perfect motivator!
- “My pet is too young.” (15%) Maybe not. Animals weighing as little as two pounds may be spayed or neutered.
- “I can't afford it.” (9%) There are programs available to help. Visit [humanesociety.org/spayday](http://humanesociety.org/spayday)
- “It's cruel.” (5%) / “It's unnatural.” (4%) Spay/neuter is a humane, effective alternative to the unnatural euthanizing of healthy, adoptable pets.