

# DESEXING





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Many cats and dogs are bred by accident due to owners not desexing their pets prior to them reaching sexual maturity. As a result, Australia has a huge pet over-population problem.

There are simply not enough homes for the amount of animals being bred, so sadly tens of thousands of healthy animals are being put to sleep every year as a result.

Desexing your pet is not just to help control the overpopulation problem, it also has many health benefits and most councils now offer reduced registration for desexed pets, so you'll save money too.

In the next few pages, the desexing procedure will be explained but if you are unsure about whether to desex your pet or not, read on and most of your questions should be answered in this book.

If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at the practice. We are more than happy to address any of your concerns.

## Making anaesthetic as safe as possible

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A lot of pet owners voice concern over putting their pet under anaesthetic. This is a valid fear as any anaesthetic, regardless of the procedure, carries an element of risk. Today's anaesthetics however are very safe and only a very small amount of complications occur.

Your pet will receive a full physical exam prior to the procedure, however not all problems can be detected during this exam. It is for this reason that the following are recommended.

### **Pre-anaesthetic Blood Test**

A blood test can be performed prior to your pet's procedure which will check their kidney and liver function. It is these two organs that are responsible for metabolising anaesthetic agents and if they are compromised in any way, anaesthetic complications can occur.

If problems are found on the blood test a different anaesthetic agent can be used which may be more suitable for your pet's condition, the surgery might be delayed until your pet is healthy enough or the anaesthetic avoided altogether.

A pre-anaesthetic blood test can also pick up underlying disease of which your pet may be showing no signs. This could allow us to effectively treat your pet's condition which could extend their life expectancy considerably eg diabetes.

Anaemia and infection can also be detected in this blood test.

This blood test may be compulsory for your pet. We will inform you if it is a requirement.

### **Intravenous (IV) fluids**

IV fluids can assist in more ways than one. A catheter is put in place to administer the fluids which then gives direct access to administer emergency drugs if required. Most importantly however, fluids help to maintain your pet's blood pressure while under anaesthetic.

Complications occur in a small number of pets but can be minimised with the above tests. The safety of your pet is first and foremost in our minds.

**If you have any further questions or reservations about the anaesthetic, please speak to our staff. We are happy to spend time with you to address any of your concerns.**



## The desexing procedure

Your pet will need to be fasted (food withheld) from the night before the procedure. Feed your pet an evening meal but at around 8pm remove any left over food so they can't graze throughout the night. Water is permitted in most cases but we will advise you if you need to withhold water as well.



listening to your pet's heart, taking their temperature and documenting their respiration and pulse rates.



by a physical exam alone. This test is sometimes compulsory but our staff will inform you of this.

When we are happy with the condition of your pet, they will receive a sedative by injection. This will ensure your pet is comfortable and not stressed. It also minimizes the amount of anaesthetic we have to use which means a faster recovery.



When it becomes your pet's time for their procedure, the anaesthetic will be administered which induces anaesthesia within seconds. Your pet is then intubated to maintain a viable airway and to administer the gaseous anaesthetic agent to maintain pain relief and unconsciousness. During the procedure, gaseous anaesthetic is used to ensure a smoother and faster recovery.



Once safely under anaesthetic, your pet's surgical nurse will clip the surgery site and clean the skin with an antiseptic cleaning scrub. Your pet may receive IV fluids (intravenous fluids) during the procedure to help support and protect their kidneys while under anaesthetic. We will advise you if this is a requirement.



During your pet's procedure, your pet's veterinary anaesthetic nurse will record their vital signs to ensure they are handling the anaesthetic well. The nurse will wait with your pet until they are alert and their tube can be removed. When safe, your pet will then be transferred into a recovery bed where they will be closely monitored until fully awake.

Your pet will have dissolvable stitches placed underneath the skin to strengthen and hold the muscle and subcutaneous fat layers and non-dissolvable stitches in the skin layer which will need removal 10 days after the procedure.



During the 10 days in which your pet has sutures, no swimming or bathing is allowed so you may want to bath your pet the day before the procedure. It's important that the surgical area be kept clean and dry but do not apply anything to the surgery site. It is also important that your pet not lick or chew at their stitches! If they do, you'll need to purchase an Elizabethan Collar from the practice to stop them!

Keep your pet quiet when you take them home and provide somewhere warm and quiet so they can rest. They should be back to normal the next day but don't let them be too active! Too much running around and jumping up can cause inflammation and swelling which may then need to be drained. Confine them to the yard and give them a light walk on the lead only until the sutures are removed.

## The desexing procedure cont...

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Sometimes additional pain relief is required and will need to be started the day after the procedure. We will advise you if pain relief is required for your pet.

Feeding your pet when you get home may be allowed but we will advise you when you pick them up. If your pet is not interested in food, don't be concerned as anaesthetic can sometimes make them feel a little queasy. They should be eating by the next day however.

Your pet's surgical site should not have any discharge and should not be swollen. A small amount of discharge can be normal, especially for large female dogs but it's always best to get it checked. Contact the practice if you notice any discharge.

After your pet's sutures have been removed it's back to normal activity! They can now run and jump as much as they please!

**If at any time you are worried about your pet, contact the practice immediately for advice. There is no such thing as a silly question.**



## In short

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### Before the procedure

- No food from 8pm the night before. Water is allowed (unless we state otherwise).
- Bathe your dog as they can't be bathed for 10 days after the procedure (not essential for cats).

### The day of the procedure

- Allow 5-10 minutes for admission the morning of the procedure.
- Your pet will stay with us at the practice for the whole day. We will advise you of a discharge time on the day.
- A small, easy to eat meal may be given when you take your pet home (unless we state otherwise).

### After the procedure

- Allow your pet to rest in a quiet environment out of the cool air. Do not allow other pets to jump on them or get them excited. Separate them if needed.
- No swimming or bathing is allowed until the sutures are removed.
- Limit running around and jumping as much as possible. Lead exercise only.
- No licking or chewing at sutures. An Elizabethan Collar will be required if they are!
- Come back 10 days after the procedure for their sutures to be removed.

### Yes, there will be shaved areas!

You will notice some of your pet's hair has been shaved in the following areas;

- Front leg or both front legs  
This is where your pet's catheter was placed in order to administer the anaesthetic and or fluids, or to take blood for a blood test.
- Groin and belly  
This area needs to be shaved and thoroughly cleaned and scrubbed so the surgery is as sterile as possible. We do not want hair falling into our pets insides!
- Neck  
This area is shaved so we can access the jugular vein in the neck to retrieve blood for a blood test. It is especially common for blood to be taken from the jugular in cats and small dogs.

You will also notice a tattoo in your pet's ear. A tattoo is a compulsory requirement for all desexed pets.

*It is not essential to take time off work for your pet's procedure, however being able to keep an eye on them the night of the procedure is advised. If you think your pet will lick their sutures in your absence, purchase an Elizabethan Collar when you pick up your pet in case you need it.*



## Desexing female pets

“Entire females are more likely to contract cancer of the reproductive tract”

### Why is desexing recommended?

Female dogs come into heat or oestrous every 6 months from about 6-10 months of age. With each dog having 2-13 puppies, it is easy to see why desexing is required at an early age if we are to reduce the amount of unwanted pets.

It is especially crucial for female cats to be desexed at an early age due to their breeding cycle. Cats have an oestrous or calling cycle during the Spring and Summer where they will cycle **every 3 weeks**. The female cat is interesting in that her system is designed to not ovulate until she is mated. This almost guarantees a pregnancy with each mating and with 2-8 kittens in a litter, you can see why we have an overpopulation problem.

#### Health benefits

The other benefits to desexing a female are related to her individual health. Entire females are more likely to contract cancer of the reproductive tract. This can be ovarian, uterine, or mammary cancer. Surgery can

be done to desex these females once the cancer occurs but of course prevention is the best course.

Mammary cancer is very common and can be widespread, starting in one teat and spreading via the lymphatic system to all teats. Surgical excision of this type of cancer is very invasive with all of the mammary tissue needing to be removed. Like with humans, it is possible that the cancer cannot be reversed which will mean an earlier death for your pet.

If you are considering breeding with your pet, check with your local council first. Some councils now require a breeding permit for any owner planning to breed from their pet. There are many standards which need to be met before a license is issued and a council officer will visit your property to ensure the standards are being met. This is to help avoid back yard breeding and reduce the number of unwanted pets.

“Females on heat or cycling will attract males  
from as far as a few kilometers away”

## How will I know if my female pet has come into ‘season’

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### **Dogs**

Your dog will develop a swollen vulva and actually start to bleed. This can become an inconvenience to the owner trying to keep the dog and the environment clean, and also protecting her from other unwanted dogs getting to her to mate. Many females in heat will seek out males in the area too, which can cause your dog to escape and be prone to injuries.

Infection secondary to the oestrous heat is also a common ailment for the female. After the cycle, the cervix may have let bacterial infection ascend and begin to grow in the uterus. This problem is called pyometra. Treatment will involve antibiotics and an emergency desexing procedure. In some females the infection can spread to the bloodstream and cause death.

An entire female who becomes pregnant goes through the gestation period of 63 days for a dog and 65 days for a cat. During this time she will change both physically and psychologically, so an

owner must be aware of her changing needs.

The birthing process too can be simple or complicated, and an owner needs to be prepared for emergencies. Whelping (birthing) difficulties can be disastrous and costly with an emergency caesarian costing up to \$3,000.00.

### **Cats**

Female cats will call (howl). This is very annoying to owners of housebound cats as they will try to escape and can often howl at all hours of the night!



“Desexing, while it is a common procedure,  
should not be taken lightly ”

## The desexing procedure

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Desexing of female pets can be performed at any age. Generally most veterinarians will desex before the age 6-10 months which is before they come into season. Desexing can be performed at a later age however with any operation, older animals do not recover as quickly as younger ones.

Desexing, while it is a common procedure, should not be taken lightly as it does involve an incision into the abdomen, removing the reproductive tract, ligating blood vessels and a 3 layer closure of the abdominal midline, subcutis and skin.

During the surgery, she is under a full general anaesthetic which does compromise the cardiovascular and respiratory systems. This requires a skilled surgeon, qualified vets and nurses, modern surgical, anaesthetic and monitoring equipment, sterile instruments and a healthy patient.

Neutering of a female pet is termed a spey. In animals we technically do an operation known as an ovariectomy. This is where both the ovaries and the uterus are removed. This prevents production of female hormones so that oestrous or a “heat” does not occur and the animal also has no uterus and so cannot become pregnant even if accidentally mated.







## Desexing male pets

“Entire males are more likely to contract cancer of the reproductive tract”

### Why is desexing recommended?

Desexing of males is performed to both control population and to help protect them from health problems associated with being entire (not desexed).

The male dog and cat do not have a season and can actually become fertile from as young as 3-4 months old. A male will try to mate with any female that is on heat or cycling. This means males will try their hardest to get out of their enclosed area in search of the female! Wandering dogs are a nuisance to the neighbourhood and are often involved in hit by car accidents. Entire male dogs are also twice as likely to end up in the pound due to their strong will to escape the yard.

Desexing male dogs is not just to help control the overpopulation problem but will help you manage their behaviour easier. It will also prevent other individual health problems. Entire male dogs are more likely to develop cancer of the reproductive tract. Sertoli cell and Leydig cell tumours of the

testicles can develop, as can prostate cancer. The prostate going through changes is dependent on testosterone which is the hormone produced by the testes. As such, males which are castrated do not tend to develop prostate cancer, infection or hypertrophy.

Male cats not castrated tend to develop more muscle and so behavioural problems are more of a concern. Just one smell of an entire male cat's urine should be enough reason alone to desex! It is very strong and foul smelling and is the reason that some catteries do not accept entire male cats as boarders. You do not want an entire male cat marking his territory on your stereo.

Behaviourally, castration can aid in the prevention of males marking areas with their urine. Desexed pets will usually show less aggression, territorialism, roaming and sexual behaviour. They are better members of the community.



## Let's address a few myths about desexing

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### **Desexing will make my pet fat.**

Wrong. Overeating (consuming more calories than required for their energy output) will make them fat. Switch your pet to a low fat or neutered diet to control calorie intake and keep up the exercise.

### **Desexing changes their personality.**

It will not change their personality but will lessen the desire to roam, fight and mark territory. Isn't that a good thing? These behaviours however may not be evident if you don't desex your pet until after the recommended desexing date when these behaviours may already be ingrained in your pet.

### **They'll be less of a male.**

Your pet will not know they have been castrated and the only negative emotion about this procedure comes from the human. They will not feel diminished in any way after their procedure.

### **Desexing will mean my dog won't be a good guard dog.**

Wrong. A good guard dog can be determined by genetics and their environment more than their sex hormones. If you are serious about your dog guarding your property, then specialised dog training is required and should be started at an early age. An out of control dog barking at every person walking by your property is a nuisance, not a good guard dog.

### **It's only female dogs that should be desexed.**

Wrong. It takes two to tango. Owners of entire male dogs are also responsible for our overpopulation problem.

### **It's better to let females have one season first.**

Wrong. In fact you will **double** your pets chances of contracting mammary cancer by allowing them to come into season.

### **But my pet is a purebred!**

Mixed breed or pure breed, there are too many pets for homes. Being a pure breed pet does not exempt them from cancer.

### **I'll find good homes for all the pups and kittens.**

Each good home you find means a good home lost for an animal in a shelter. Overpopulation happens one litter at a time.

### **Desexing is too expensive.**

Owning a pet carries with it responsibility and one of those responsibilities is making sure you can afford their health needs. If you think you might have difficulty paying for an emergency vet bill, consider Pet Insurance. Some premiums also help cover the cost of desexing. Veterinarians already drastically reduce the price of desexing. It should be a lot higher than it actually is for the level of skill, equipment and staff required to perform the procedure.