

The benefits of spaying and neutering

Forever Friends Cat Rescue is a non-profit organization based in Altona. We operate with volunteers, donations, and support from our community. Our mission is to rescue the lost, abandoned, and homeless cats in our community. We are dedicated to the care and wellbeing of our local feral cat population and to help educate the public on the need to spay/neuter pets, the prevention of animal cruelty, and the importance of responsible pet ownership.

We are grateful for this opportunity to use this column in a number of ways: featuring cats that are available for adoption, sharing stories of cats that have already passed through our rescue (happy ones and sad ones, because those happen too), announcing fundraising events, and providing educational content.

One of the most important decisions a pet owner must make is whether to spay or neuter their pet. By deciding to spay or neuter, you will protect your cat's health, improve their behaviour and help reduce the widespread overpopulation problem.

Cats that have been fixed live longer, healthier lives. Neutering your male cat will prevent testicular cancer and eliminate most prostate issues. Spaying your female cat prevents pyometra, a potentially fatal uterine infection, it also reduces the risk of certain other cancers of the reproductive system. It prevents breast tumours, which are malignant or cancerous in 90% percent of cats (Merck Veterinary Manual).

Spaying before the first heat, at 4-5 months old, is your best protection. Cats as young as 6 months old can have kittens, which is devastating to the health of the young female. Her own body will stop growing in order to gestate the kittens. Often these kittens are unhealthy and weak due to the stress on the young mother's body.

It is generally considered safe for kittens as young as eight weeks old to be spayed or neutered.

There are many behavioural benefits to spaying or neutering your cat. A neutered male will be better behaved and less likely to mark his territory (which intact males do by spraying strong smelling, testosterone-filled urine all over the inside or outside of a house). He will also be less likely to roam. The drive to reproduce can entice male cats to walk many miles from home. They risk injury or death due to traffic or predators and are likely to be involved in cat fights that often produce wounds that are prone to infection.

A spayed female will stop having heat cycles (an uncomfortable and sometimes painful event which can happen every 3 weeks and can last up to 14 days). In an effort to advertise for mates, an intact female will yowl and urinate more frequently, sometimes outside the litter box. Cats will do just about anything to find a mate; even your inside cat may find creative ways to escape the house, such as tearing out screens or door dashing. The best way to keep them safe is to eliminate their need to procreate. Another benefit to early spaying or neutering is that you may be able to avoid aggression issues.

Farm cats also benefit from being spayed or neutered, as they will be healthier, content, stay-at-home cats. A healthy cat is a more active and successful hunter. When

the drive to find a mate and reproduce is removed, they have more time to hunt.

A common misconception is that spaying or neutering will cause your pet to become overweight. Lack of exercise, overfeeding and kibble-only diets will cause your pet to pack on the extra pounds—not sterilization. Your pet will remain fit and trim as long as you continue to provide exercise and an appropriate diet.

We think that kittens are adorable too, but if you want the cuddly cuteness they provide or you would like your children to experience the miracle of birth, please consider volunteering for a local rescue or humane society. We can guarantee that you have an experience to remember, without being financially responsible for numerous cats...because remember, kittens don't stay kittens forever.

An issue many rescues and humane societies face is the free kitten giveaway. These kittens tend to find their way to local rescues when people realize there is no such thing as a "free kitten". Vetting costs money. Food and supplies cost money. The lucky few find homes or are surrendered to humane societies and rescues, the unlucky are all too often abandoned and left to fend for themselves. These kittens (if they survive) grow up to have litters of their own, adding dramatically to the overpopulation problem. They wander and become nuisance cats that may eventually be trapped by animal control, then make their way through the pound and into rescues and humane societies. It's a never-ending cycle. The reality is responsible pet ownership costs money.

By spaying or neutering your pet, you can help protect them against certain illnesses, help address unwanted behaviours, and save lives by helping reduce the overpopulation issue. Please contact your local veterinary clinic to discuss and/or schedule your pet's appointment and encourage your family and friends to do the same.

Please spay or neuter...be part of the solution instead of adding to the problem.

WHY SPAY OR NEUTER?



An unspayed female cat, her mate, and all of their offspring producing an average of 2.8 surviving kittens per litter at a rate of two litters per year adds up quickly.

- 1 year: 12 cats
 - 2 years: 67 cats
 - 3 years: 376 cats
 - 4 years: 2,107 cats
 - 5 years: 11,801 cats
 - 6 years: 66,088 cats
 - 7 years: 370,082 cats
 - 8 years: 2,072,514 cats
 - 9 years: 11,606,077 cats
- Spaying or neutering one cat saves MANY lives**