

Should I Get My Pet Desexed?

As well as stopping unwanted breeding, there are many good reasons to have your pet desexed. So, the short answer is probably **yes**. However this depends on a number of factors including the species, sex and age of your pet.

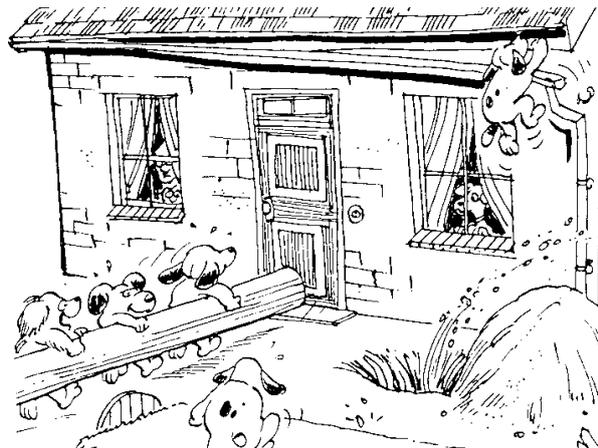
Of course, you also need to decide whether or not you would like to breed your pet in the future. The aim of this leaflet is to explain the advantages and disadvantages, and also to dispel a few myths about desexing.

What is desexing?

The terms “*desexing*” or “*neutering*” are used to describe the surgical procedures performed on animals to stop them from breeding. In males this involves the surgical removal of the testicles, leaving the penis and scrotum intact. This is also referred to as “*castration*”. In females, the surgery involves the removal of the ovaries and uterus (ovario-hysterectomy). This procedure is commonly referred to as a “*spay*”. At Macarthur Vet Group we use the best possible anaesthetic, surgical and pain relief techniques to ensure your pet’s safety and comfort.

When should my pet be desexed?

We generally recommend that dogs and cats be desexed at 5-6 months of age (females before their first season). There is no maximum age, so it’s never too late, but there are definite advantages to having it done at this age. Some people recommend later desexing for large breed male dogs – you can discuss this option with your vet. We can also desex other species including rabbits and ferrets, and there are good medical reasons for doing so.



ADVANTAGES OF DESEXING

Prevents unwanted breeding:

Stopping unwanted breeding is the most obvious reason for having your pet desexed. Having a litter of puppies or kittens can be a lot of work, and a lot of expense. It’s even more expensive if something goes wrong. Aside from desexing, there is no safe contraceptive or “morning-after” treatment available for dogs and cats. So unless you’re serious about breeding, it really is better for both yourself and your pet to have them desexed. If you are serious about breeding, we invite you to discuss it with us first, so that you know exactly what’s involved.

Preventing unwanted breeding is also one of the main aims of the *Companion Animals Act*. There are a lot of unwanted dogs and cats already in our community, and many of these either become feral and kill our wildlife, or else have to be destroyed by the pound or RSPCA. To encourage desexing, these laws give large discounts on lifetime registration fees for desexed dogs.

If you have proof of desexing, lifetime registration costs just \$58.00 or \$25.00 for pensioners. If however your pet is not desexed, council registration costs \$210.00. Also, if you allow your pet to breed, then the *Act* requires that you pay to have all the puppies or kittens microchipped – even if you are planning to give them away!

Reduces behavioural problems:

Desexing can prevent many of the behavioural problems that occur in dogs and cats. These are problems that occur either directly as a result of the reproductive cycle, or because of “dominance” or “territorial” behaviour, where your pet wants to demonstrate his/her dominance over other animals (and people!) around them. Desexed pets are often **easier to train**. These are some of the problems that can be prevented (or at least reduced) by desexing:

- **Aggression** towards, and fighting with, other animals (this is especially important for male cats and dogs)
- **Aggression to people**

- **Breeding behaviour**
Dogs (females) come into “*season*” once every 6-12 months. This is where their body prepares for mating and pregnancy. During this time they will have a bloody vaginal discharge for about 2-3 weeks. They may also try to get out of your yard to mate. Male dogs will try even harder to escape and get to her if they can smell a bitch coming into season in your neighbourhood.

This can lead to unwanted pregnancies, as well as fights, car accidents, lost dogs and illnesses from exposure to other animals. After being in season, bitches may also go through *phantom pregnancies*, which can be distressing in some cases.

Cats have a breeding season that lasts from about July to March (but sometimes longer) where they will come into season once every 3 weeks. During this time, cats can seem to cry & howl almost constantly and behave strangely. They frequently fight during this time, and the noise of cats fighting or mating (especially at night) can be pretty awful!

- **Mounting your leg!** – and other objects.
- **Urine Spraying and Urine Marking**
Mostly a problem with males, this is where tomcats spray urine over the walls in your house, and dogs cock their leg on everything in sight. This is part of their procedure for marking territory, and can create a horrible smell if done in inappropriate places.

Prevents illness later in life:

There are a number of common illnesses (many of them life-threatening) that can be prevented by desexing.

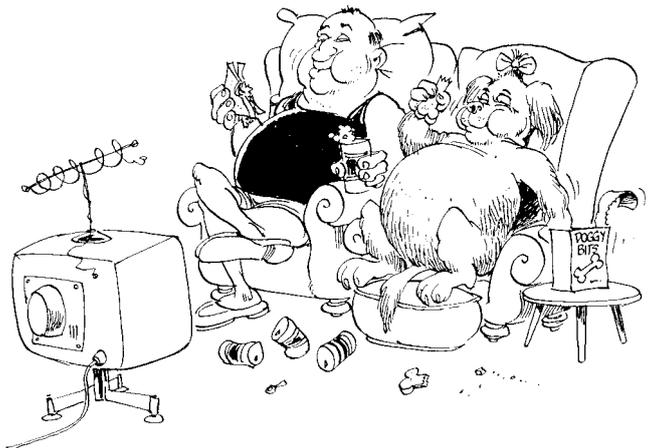
- **Uterine cysts and pyometra** (pus in the uterus) are very common problems in bitches. Cats can also be affected. These are serious (potentially fatal) illnesses that can be difficult to diagnose and require major surgery to fix. Desexing completely prevents them.
- **Prostate enlargement and tumours around the anus** are common in male dogs. They are usually prevented by desexing.
- **Cancer in the mammary glands** (breasts) is the most common cancer in female dogs. It is often malignant, and often untreatable by the time it is noticed. Desexing before the first season will prevent over 99% of these tumours! This benefit is largely lost if you wait until the bitch is 2 years of age or more.
- **Mastitis** of the mammary glands
- **Tumours and cysts** of the ovaries and testicles are not common but are serious problems when they do occur. These are completely prevented by desexing.
- **Hormonal disturbances**
- **Infectious Diseases** - Animals that have not been desexed are more likely to roam, fight and mate with other animals. Thus, they are more likely to come in contact with a variety of diseases including Feline Aids. Cat-fight abscesses are one of the most frequent problems we see in cats. The risk of all of these diseases can be minimised by desexing.

Are there any disadvantages?

There are no real disadvantages to desexing your cat, nor to castrating dogs. Occasionally, spayed female dogs may experience urinary incontinence after desexing. This is where she leaks urine in her sleep. Incontinence occurs in only a small percentage of cases and is thought to be caused by a lack of oestrogen hormone. If it does occur, it can usually be well controlled with medication. We do not consider that the small risk of incontinence should outweigh the many advantages of having your dog spayed. Some people recommend later desexing for large breed male dogs – you can discuss this option with your vet.

What does desexing cost?

Desexing requires one day in hospital and a general anaesthetic. The costs vary according to the species, sex, size and age of the pet. For females, it costs a bit more if she is already pregnant or in season. If you would like a quote, please give us a call. The costs of desexing are partly offset by the large discounts given on council registration fees for desexed dogs and cats.



SOME MYTHS ABOUT DESEXING

- **It will change my pet's personality.**
It won't. He/she should be just as smart, active and playful as before. Favourable behavioural changes can occur in regards to aggression, territorial and breeding behaviour, as previously discussed.
- **My pet will gain weight.**
The body may metabolise food at a reduced rate after desexing. Also, your pet will naturally stop growing at around 8-12 months of age. For both these reasons, you may need to feed your pet a bit less. Avoid overfeeding and there is no reason for your pet to be overweight.
- **It's better to let her have one season or one litter first.** Wrong! Some people would still argue that it's better to let a dog or cat have her first season before being desexed. There is no reason to do this. Desexing before your pet has her first season has definite medical advantages, and is considered by most experts to be the best approach. Some people want their dog/cat to have one litter before getting them desexed. They want the "fun" of having puppies/kittens running around for a while. Of course this is your choice. But you need to consider the amount of work involved (and the potential costs, including microchips and vaccinations) before making this decision. Remember too that there is already an oversupply of puppies and kittens, and that some of the medical benefits of desexing are lost if you wait until after she's had a litter. If you are considering breeding your pet, we invite you to discuss it with us first, so that you know exactly what you're getting into. Some people believe that it helps the dog to mature emotionally if she is allowed to have a litter. In some cases, young dogs do mature quite quickly after having a litter of puppies. But really, to be fair on the dog, you shouldn't really be breeding her until she's 2-3 years old anyway. Having a litter any earlier is really trying to make her grow up too fast!
- **Desexing is cruel, unnatural and will make my pet feel sexually deprived.**
Some people (especially men!) just can't stand the thought of getting their "best friend" castrated. But it really isn't cruel and it won't make your pet feel deprived in any way. In fact it may even relieve any existing sexual frustration. As far as being "unnatural", it should be remembered that we're not talking about wild animals. Dogs and cats are bred to be our companions. If we can accept that it's OK to keep them as pets, then surely the most responsible thing to do is to care for them in their role of companion as best we can. Desexing helps to keep our pets healthy and makes them better able to fit into our community and be the companions that we want them to be.

Need more information?

If you would like more information about desexing, or about any of the other issues discussed in this leaflet, please phone us on 4627-1333, or come in and discuss it in person.

We also have another leaflet "**Getting your pet desexed**" that describes exactly what's involved in the procedure.