

The Truth about Spay and Neuter

By Byron Maas, DVM

The truth is that getting your pet spayed or neutered can save countless lives. On average 64% of all animals taken to shelters nationwide have to be euthanized. The numbers are staggering. One estimate is that between 10 and 12 million pets are euthanized because of lack of available homes. Purebreds account for nearly 30 % of animals in shelters. Everyday 70,000 puppies and kittens are born in this country while only 10,000 people are born. The math is simple. There will never be enough homes for all of these animals at this rate.

I often hear that families want to witness the miracle of birth and promote breeding just once for this reason. Puppies and kittens are usually born at night and in seclusion so children are not likely to even see a birth. I would suggest that a visit to an area shelter is more educational to see the tragic results of overpopulation. It should be explained to children that preventing the birth of some pets can save the lives of others. Animals should not be discarded and the real miracle is life itself. Medical evidence refutes the claim that having a litter makes a better pet. Females getting spayed before their first heat or estrous cycle are healthier. Even diseases like breast cancer can be prevented in your pet.

“Brutus is a purebred and has papers a mile long” is another common line I get. I hate to say it but at least one in four animals at the shelter is a purebred. There are just too many dogs and cats - mixed breed and purebred period. Promoting breeding will only add to the situation and teaches that animals can be discarded. Everybody loves the cute little adorable puppies and kittens and it is true that they strum at your heart strings. You may even be able to find homes for all of your pet's litter, but each home found means one less home for an animal in need at a shelter. The crisis of pet overpopulation is created and perpetuated one litter at a time.

Spaying and neutering does not affect a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. In fact genetics and environment form a personality more than sex hormones. Pets do not have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Often I get that pet owners feel that neutering will somehow make a pet feel less male. Don't worry, “Rascal” will not suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered. He will however be less likely to roam, bite, scratch, fight, mark territory and develop testicular cancer. So the decision seems simple.

You personally can make a difference by spaying or neutering your pet. Do your part to stop the tragedy of pet overpopulation now.