

# Spaying and Neutering Puppies and Kittens

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Euthanasia of healthy unwanted cats and dogs remains the leading cause of death in these species. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that 4-6 million are euthanized annually in this country alone. The leading source of pets entering animal shelters are unwanted litters, and for this reason the American Veterinary Medical Association advises that all pets be neutered before adoption, including puppies and kittens as young as 6 weeks old. We routinely perform pediatric spays and neuters at HOV, but have received many questions regarding this practice.

The issue of pediatric spay/neuter of pets has remained controversial despite the lack of scientific data to support waiting until an animal reaches puberty to spay or neuter. Scientific studies have been performed to examine the safety of the procedure, as well as potential short-term and long-term problems that may arise from early spay/neuter. Below are some of the findings.

Spaying and neutering animals at 6-7 weeks of age caused no more surgical death or complications than spay/neuter at 6-7 months of age. In fact, surgery time and recovery from anesthesia is significantly reduced in young animals.

Retrospective studies show that early age spaying or neutering did not affect growth rates, food intake or weight gain. Instead of causing stunted growth, early spay/neuter may result in a slight increase in adult height.

Activity level, playfulness, vocalization, excitement, aggression, and affection were the same between dogs and cats that were neutered early versus those neutered after puberty. Neutered dogs or cats were not lethargic or inactive.

In response to concerns about urinary incontinence, there was no difference between dogs and cats neutered early and those neutered at 7 months of age.

In essence, the conclusion was overwhelmingly that early age spay/neuter is safe and effective, and does not seem to affect skeletal, physical, or behavioral development. Early spay/neuter can benefit the animal, the new owner, and provide animal population control for the community.