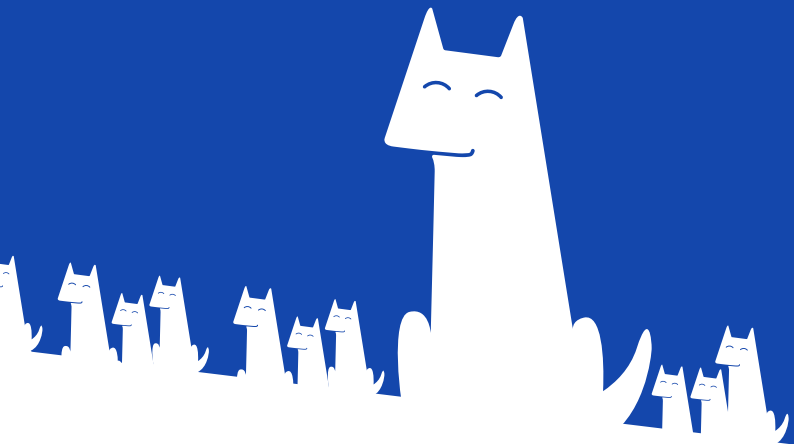


# Neutering – family planning for felines



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**ESSENTIAL GUIDE 6**



Cats Protection believes that getting your cat neutered before it can breed is an essential part of responsible cat ownership. Cats are very effective breeders and the number of kittens they produce increases in line with the amount of food and shelter available. Without neutering, the UK's cat population can quickly get out of control. Please don't add to the plight of the thousands of unwanted cats already out there. Overpopulation increases feline infectious disease, stress-related disease, feline conflict and compromises cats' welfare.

## What is neutering?

Neutering is a surgical operation which stops female cats – queens – from becoming pregnant and male cats – toms – from making females pregnant.

- A female cat is spayed – her ovaries and uterus (womb) – are removed
- A male cat is castrated – his testicles are removed

Cats Protection generally recommends that kittens are neutered at around **four months of age or younger** – **although your cat can be neutered at any age**. Neutering is the best way to deal with the problems of unwanted pregnancies, by preventing the problem in the first place. Neutering also prevents some cancers and infections, reduces straying, fighting and spraying.

## When to neuter?

Traditionally, cats were neutered from six months of age. However, current scientific data indicates that there are no disadvantages in neutering at a younger age – for example, from eight weeks onwards. As kittens can reach sexual

maturity and breed from four months, Cats Protection generally recommends that kittens are neutered at around four months of age or younger.

## Why neuter?

Neutering has many health benefits, as well as helping to reduce the number of unwanted cats in the UK.

### Unneutered – ‘entire’ – male cats:

- are more likely to end up injured or catch diseases from fighting, with subsequent suffering and vet bills
- routinely travel a large territory of many miles in search of unneutered females, risking road accidents and injury and meaning you miss the contact of having a pet cat
- will spray smelly urine to mark territory and attract females
- are at risk of tumours of the testicles
- are not better hunters than unneutered cats, as hunting is not a sexual behaviour
- may experience a high level of stress akin to frustration if unable to find a mate

### Conversely, neutered male cats:

- are less likely to roam, reducing the risk of them suffering from car accidents
- are less likely to fight which reduces the risk of them getting injured or contracting serious diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) or Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV)
- are less likely to spray
- are unable to develop tumours of the testicles
- make better pets and are more likely to be ‘homebodies’

### **Unneutered – entire – female cats:**

- frequently become pregnant from four months of age
- will often have litters of kittens three times a year. This adds to the overpopulation problem and increases costs for the owner, especially if there are complications during pregnancy or birth
- will call and wail every three weeks during the breeding season – January to August – to attract a mate, until they become pregnant
- are more likely to contract diseases spread through sexual contact and mating behaviour
- are at risk of cancers of the ovaries, uterus and mammary glands, as well as developing pyometra, a serious infection of the womb

### **Conversely, neutered female cats:**

- won't become pregnant, so there will be no expense associated with litters of kittens
- do not call or wail as unneutered queens do – so less disturbed sleep for the owner and neighbours!
- are less likely to contract diseases such as FIV and FeLV spread by bites and mating behaviour
- are unable to develop cancer of the ovaries or uterus. They are also at greatly reduced risk of developing mammary cancer – especially if neutered early

### **The kittens born following an unplanned pregnancy:**

- may be at risk of disease
- cost a lot to look after and be provided with veterinary care – far more than is likely to be recouped from trying to sell them in a market where there are plenty already
- may find themselves homeless
- may deprive another unwanted cat or kitten from finding a new home as there are not enough homes to go round

Many owners don't know which roaming 'stranger' cats their unneutered pet may have mated with, so are unaware of the potentially fatal infectious diseases that the cat may have been infected with. Also the temperament of the tom can affect the behaviour of any offspring which are born. Risking mating with an unknown 'stranger' can lead to the birth of kittens that are unsuitable as family pets.

## The operation

Your cat will need to spend a day at the veterinary surgery and will be given a general anaesthetic, so no food should be offered in the hours prior to the operation. Your vet will advise you about when you should feed. The operation for both male and female cats is very simple and usually you will be able to drop your cat off and pick them back up on the same day.

Afterwards, a female cat will have a small shaved area on her side or belly – this hair will grow back in a few weeks. She will also have stitches and if these are not dissolvable, they will be taken out by the vet around 10 days later.

Cats are very resilient and stoical – far more so than humans – and usually recover very quickly from the operation. Your vet will advise on the best care for your cat as he or she recovers. Kittens seem to recover even more quickly than adult cats. Your cat will require much less food after neutering, as his or her body has less work to do, so you will probably need to monitor your cat's weight and reduce the amount of food provided to prevent your cat from becoming too fat. This will also save you money too!

## How much does it cost?

The cost of the operation varies according to where you live. The average cost for a male cat is between £30 and £60 and the average cost for a female cat is between £40 and £80. Your vet will be happy to give you a quote before the operation takes place and we recommend phoning a number of veterinary practices. Cats Protection offers financial assistance to cat owners on benefits or low income in some cases. For more details visit [www.cats.org.uk/neutering](http://www.cats.org.uk/neutering) or phone 03000 12 12 12.

## Find a vet to neuter your cat

While almost all vets will offer neutering, some do not routinely offer neutering before six months, although the numbers are rapidly increasing thanks to support from groups including the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA). To find a veterinary practice near you which offers earlier neutering, please visit Cats Protection's website [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)

Earlier neutering has been common practice in many countries, including the USA and Australia, for many years and there is a proven track record of its safety and effectiveness. Studies show no evidence of long-term negative developmental or behavioural effects. Improved techniques and drugs have meant that former concerns over the risks of surgery are unwarranted and it is felt that young kittens recover from the operation much more quickly than adult cats.

## Facts to dispel the neutering myths

- Cats can start breeding from just four months of age
- Kittens can be safely neutered before six months of age
- Cats will readily breed with their brothers, sisters and parents
- It is not beneficial for a cat to have a season or 'just one litter' before being spayed

- The length of pregnancy in cats is just nine weeks and a female cat can often come into season again just six weeks after giving birth
- A cat can quite easily have up to three litters a year with five or six kittens in each. That adds up to 18 caring homes for Cats Protection to find each year, just for one cat's kittens! This level of breeding is very draining and can be harmful for the mother cat
- One unneutered female cat can be responsible for 20,000 descendants in just five years – unneutered cats are very good at finding each other and unplanned, unwanted pregnancies are all too common
- Neutered cats do not 'miss' their organs or opportunities to reproduce or rear a litter – they are not people!
- Neutering even if a queen is in season, pregnant or lactating can be performed and is best discussed with your vet

While the majority of owners do neuter their cats, sadly a large number of owned cats are allowed to breed before being neutered, adding to the overpopulation problem and the demand on overstretched animal charities. Please don't leave it too late. Speak to your vet and book your cat's neutering appointment today. It should benefit your cat, it may prevent your cat suffering and it is the most important action you can take to help the wider cat population.

### **Learn more about your cat online!**

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

## ESSENTIAL GUIDES

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For more information about Cats Protection or to make a donation, please visit [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk) or phone our Helpline on 03000 12 12 12.

Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)

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