Desexing

Welcome to University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Sydney. We operate a state of the art veterinary teaching hospital that treats both referral and first opinion cases. As part of our service we also operate a Desexing Clinic, which is responsible for the surgical sterilization of dogs and cats.

Why should I have my cat or dog desexed?
We recommend desexing of all dogs and cats kept for non-breeding purposes. Besides the obvious reasons of permanently preventing unwanted litters of puppies and kittens, sterilization has many other health benefits. In male dogs, castration reduces the likelihood of prostate disease, testicular cancer and aggression towards other dogs. In male cats, castration reduces urine spraying and odour and aggression towards other cats. In female dogs and cats, spaying prevents the development of womb infections (pyometra) and reduces the risk of breast cancer.

What is the best age for desexing?
We generally recommend desexing between 4 and 6 months of age once all vaccinations have been completed. If your dog is a breed predisposed to hip dysplasia you should consider having them desexed before 16 weeks of age so that their hip development can be evaluated. This is important as early intervention to reduce the impact of hip dysplasia must be performed before 16 weeks of age.

What does the procedure involve?
In the case of male animals both testicles are removed via a skin incision. In female cats and dogs an incision is made through the skin and muscle of the belly. The reproductive organs are removed through this incision, which is then stitched closed.

What are the risks associated with surgery?
The main risks associated with surgery are the risks associated with the anaesthetic and the risks associated with the procedure. Most of the animals coming in for desexing are young and healthy and in the lowest anaesthetic risk category. In addition the anaesthetic is closely monitored by a veterinary anaesthetist throughout the procedure. Although we cannot eliminate all risk, we minimize it as much as we are able.

The main risk associated with surgery is haemorrhage (bleeding) during the procedure. This is because we need to cut through some large blood vessels in order to perform the operation. Generally we are aware of bleeding during the procedure and can correct it, but occasionally bleeding can occur post operatively.

The day after surgery, there is often some bruising and tenderness associated with the wounds for which we can give pain relief in hospital. Many dogs will also go home with a short course of pain relief tablets. If you feel your pet is experiencing pain at home, then please contact us. After surgery problems with infection may arise, reactions to stitch material, breakage of the internal stitches and removal of the stitches by your pet.

What problems can develop after desexing?
Desexing tends to reduce the metabolic rate, which means desexed animals are more prone to putting on weight. Some female dogs become urinary incontinent after desexing and will "leak" urine particularly when they are lying down. Normally this happens later on in life and can usually be managed with medication.

My pet is in heat, can it be desexed?
In general we prefer not to desex female animals that are in heat because this increases the risk of the procedure. It is better to wait 2 – 3 weeks until after the heat has finished before booking them in for desexing.

I have been told my pet has a retained testicle, what does this mean?
The testicles develop inside the body close to the kidneys and descend through the groin area and into the scrotum soon after birth. Occasionally a testicle becomes “lost” along this route. If the testicle remains outside the scrotum there is a much higher risk of it becoming cancerous. We may use ultrasound to locate the missing testicle(s). This enables us to plan our surgical approach more effectively. In most cases two separate incisions are required to remove both testicles, resulting in an extended surgical time and unfortunately greater cost!

I would like to have my pet desexed, how do I make a booking and what do I need to do beforehand?
The Desexing Clinic takes place each Tuesday and a booking is required. In order to make a booking you will need to phone our reception staff on 9351 3437. They will make an appointment for you early on a Tuesday morning. Full payment of the cost of the procedure is expected prior to discharge of your pet. We require that your pet is up to date with vaccinations prior to desexing. Pets need to be fasted from 10.00pm on Monday evening prior to their surgery. They can have water overnight.

I would like to have my pet desexed, what happens when I arrive at the clinic?
Pets are admitted between 8.00am and 9.00 on a Monday. On admission a veterinary intern will ask you a series of questions to gather information about your pet’s general health status and previous medical problems. They will then examine your pet before consulting with one of the attending veterinarians, who will organize for your pet to be admitted.

Prior to surgery the hair is clipped off the belly area and the skin is sterilized. Surgery is performed by the veterinarian in conjunction with the veterinary intern assigned to your pet. There is a fully qualified and experienced veterinarian in attendance at all times during the surgery. During the procedure your pet is constantly monitored by a veterinary anaesthetist. Following surgery your pet is placed into the recovery ward where it is monitored until awake from the anaesthetic. Following recovery your pet is admitted to the general ward where it is monitored overnight until discharge the following day (except for castrations, which generally go home the same evening). During this time your pet is checked regularly and receives ongoing pain relief as required.

How do I care for my pet, once they come home?
Your pet may be a little less active than normal with a slightly reduced appetite for the first 1 – 2 days after surgery. Please feed them as normal. Please do not wash or bathe your pet until the skin stitches are removed. This is generally 10 – 14 days after surgery. It is important to prevent your pet from biting or licking at the stitches. If you observe your pet worrying the wound at home, please obtain an Elizabethan collar from us. Please check the wound daily. If it becomes swollen, seems to be sore or has any discharge, then please bring your pet in for a recheck. Exercise should be restricted until the skin stitches are removed. Dogs may be walked on a leash for up to 10 minutes twice daily.

We hope this information leaflet has answered your questions regarding desexing at the University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Sydney. If you have any further questions, then please do not hesitate to contact us on 9351-3437.