

All About Pets

The national pet care information service

NEUTERING RABBITS



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Neutering is not just a means of population control. For females especially it is vitally important for ensuring long-term health, and both sexes make far better pets after neutering. Above all, it means that rabbits can easily be kept together without fighting or breeding... like rabbits!



What are the benefits of neutering?

Females

The most obvious reason for having a female rabbit (doe) neutered is to prevent her from producing baby rabbits. A female rabbit will come into season more than 10 times a year and she could be having litters of baby rabbits (also known as kittens) almost constantly throughout her life. This means a lot of baby rabbits needing homes.

Another advantage is that your rabbit will have a longer life expectancy – up to 80 per cent of un-neutered (or ‘entire’) female rabbits will develop cancer of the uterus before the age of five years. This usually results in an early and painful death. A spayed rabbit is also less likely to develop breast cancer.

Un-neutered female rabbits become very territorial when they reach sexual maturity (usually at four to six months old). This is demonstrated by aggressive behaviour towards other rabbits and even you. Your doe may bite, scratch, kick and growl at you when you open her hutch to feed her. An entire doe will also experience false pregnancies – during which her behaviour could become worse.

Fortunately these problems can all be resolved very simply by having your rabbit neutered. A neutered female rabbit is much less territorial and as a result is a more relaxed and pleasant-natured rabbit to have.

Males

Un-castrated male rabbits (bucks) can be aggressive with other rabbits and humans and they will also spray urine like male cats. Neutering a male rabbit produces a much calmer, relaxed pet. If you keep your rabbit indoors, neutering will make him much easier to litter train!

When should my rabbit be neutered?

Male rabbits are usually neutered when they are four to five months old. Female rabbits should be at least six months old before they are neutered.

Is it ever too late to have my rabbit neutered?

There is no upper age limit for neutering your rabbit. However the risks of anaesthesia may be increased and this is something that you should discuss with your vet.

Is neutering dangerous?

Although anaesthesia of rabbits has in the past been risky, modern techniques and drugs have made it much safer. There is some risk if your pet is older (over three years) or has other medical problems, such as a runny nose or 'snuffles', and this is something you should discuss with your vet.

What does neutering involve?

A general anaesthetic is required for both castration in the male rabbit and spaying in the female rabbit. Some fur will usually be shaved from the underside. The uterus (womb) and ovaries are removed in the female and the testicles in the male. Your rabbit should be ready to come home on the same day as surgery, as soon as the anaesthetic has worn off. Where fur was shaved it may re-grow slightly darker than that on the rest of its body but the contrast often disappears when your rabbit moults its fur the next time. Males are usually back to normal within 12 hours, females may be a little quiet for a day or two. It is extremely important that your pet should be eating within 24 hours of surgery.

Will neutering make my rabbit fat and lazy?

Your rabbit is likely to need less food after it has been neutered but you can prevent it becoming overweight by giving it fewer pellets or less rabbit mix. Most owners find that any changes in their rabbit's personality are for the better as many neutered rabbits become more relaxed, affectionate and playful.

Is neutering expensive?

Different vets may charge slightly different prices for a neutering operation. If money is short then you may get help from one of the animal charities. However, it is wise to balance the costs of neutering against the expense of having an unwanted litter of baby rabbits. A pregnant rabbit will need more food to support herself and her offspring, the babies will need veterinary attention and you may have to advertise to find them good homes.



Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.

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