

WHY YOUR RABBIT SHOULD BE SPAYED

By Teresa Gregory, DVM



Almost everyone knows the health and societal benefits of having their dogs and cats spayed or neutered, but not everyone realizes that it is at least as important to have their pet rabbits altered.

The most important reason to have your female rabbit spayed is the huge risk of uterine cancer in unspayed females. Up to 85% of female rabbits will have uterine cancer by age 3 if they are not spayed, by 5 years of age virtually all of them will be affected. For an animal whose potential life span is 10+ years, this is a devastating statistic. Signs of uterine cancer in older rabbits can include bloody vaginal discharge, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, bloating and weakness. Other health risks related to not having your rabbit spayed include uterine infection, uterine aneurysms, and breast cancer. Male rabbits are less likely to have reproductive cancers, but testicular cancer can occur in unneutered males.

There are also many behavioral problems associated with mature rabbits that are not spayed or neutered. Both males and female rabbits will spray urine to mark their territory, and this behavior is much more common in unaltered rabbits. Rabbits that haven't been spayed or neutered are much more likely to bite and exhibit other aggressive behaviors.

Besides health and behavioral issues, another important reason to alter your bunny is pet overpopulation. Rabbits are the third most common animal euthanized around the country. Allowing your pet rabbit to breed adds to the problem.

The surgical procedure for altering rabbits is not too much different than that for dogs or cats. However, one important difference in care before surgery is that rabbits should not be fasted overnight prior to surgery. Rabbits cannot vomit, so that removes the risk of aspiration, and rabbits GI tracts are made to deal with a constant intake of high fiber food. Fasting them can cause GI problems. Ideally, the surgery should be done at 4-5 months of age.