

Spaying Your Cat

Frequently Asked Questions

An ovariectomy (spay) is the surgical removal of the female reproductive organs. The operation removes the two ovaries, the uterine horns, and the body of the uterus.

What Are the Indications For Performing an Ovariectomy (Spay)?

This operation is indicated to avoid heat (estrus) cycles, prevent pregnancy, remove diseased or cancerous female reproductive organs and markedly decrease the risk of acquired diseases of the female reproductive system. The spay operation essentially removes the possibility of a severe infection of the uterus (pyometra).

What Preoperative Examinations or Tests Are Needed Before an Ovariectomy (Spay)?

Preoperative tests depend in part on the age and general health of the cat. In young cats, minimal tests are needed provided the pet has been vaccinated, dewormed and proven healthy based on physical examination. Often simple blood tests, such as a packed cell volume or blood count, will be done prior to anesthesia. In older cats, it would be common to perform a routine blood count, serum biochemical tests, urinalysis and possibly a chest X-ray or EKG prior to anesthesia. These recommendations vary on a case-by-case basis, and depend on the overall health of the cat.

What Type of Anesthesia Is Needed For an Ovariectomy (Spay)?

As in a human patient, the procedure in cats requires general anesthesia to induce complete unconsciousness and relaxation. In the usual case, the cat will receive a pre-anesthetic sedative-analgesic drug to help her relax, a brief intravenous anesthetic to allow placement of a breathing tube in the windpipe, and subsequently inhalation (gas) anesthesia in oxygen during the actual surgery.

How Is the Ovariectomy (Spay) Operation Done?

Following anesthesia, the cat is placed on a surgical table, lying on her back. The hair is clipped over the middle of the abdomen and the skin is scrubbed with surgical soap to disinfect the area. A sterile drape is placed over the surgical site. A scalpel is used to incise the skin at the middle of the abdomen, and then the abdominal cavity is opened. The organs of the female reproductive tract are identified and the major blood vessels supplying the ovaries and the uterus are ligated (tied off). This must be done before these organs can be removed. Sutures (stitches) that dissolve over time are used to tie off the blood vessels and also to close the uterus above the cervix. Sometimes, surgical staples or clips are used. The abdominal incision is then closed with one or two layers of sutures (stitches). The outer layer of skin is closed with sutures or surgical staples; these need to be removed in about 10 to 14 days.

How Long Does the Ovariectomy (Spay) Take to Perform?

The procedure takes about 30 minutes to 45 minutes to perform in most cases, including the needed time for preparation and anesthesia.

What Are the Risks and Complications of an Ovariectomy (Spay) Operation?

The overall risk of this surgery in a healthy young cat is very low. While there are no published statistics the risk of death is probably less than 1 in 500. The major risks are those of general anesthesia, bleeding (hemorrhage), postoperative infection and wound breakdown (dehiscence) over the incision. Overall complication rate is low, but serious complications can result in death or the need for additional surgery.

What Is the Typical Postoperative Aftercare For an Ovariohysterectomy (Spay)?

Postoperative medication should be given to relieve pain, which is judged in most cases to be mild to moderate and can be effectively eliminated with safe and effective pain medicines. Generally young cats are acting normally within 24 to 48 hours and are released one or two days after surgery. It is difficult to determine that they just completed surgery. The home care requires reduced activity until the stitches are removed in 10 to 14 days. The incision line should be inspected daily for signs of redness, discharge, swelling or pain.

How Long Is the Hospital Stay Following an Ovariohysterectomy (Spay)?

The typical stay is one to two days. The spay may be combined with a declawing operation and this may require an extra day in the hospital to allow bandage changes of the paws.