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## Basis for Position on Mandatory Spay-Neuter in the Canine and Feline

### [Members of the Spay Neuter Task Force](#)

The American College of Theriogenologists (ACT) is the certifying college for veterinarians board certified in reproduction (specialists) and the Society for Theriogenology (SFT) is an organization of veterinarians with a special interest in reproduction in veterinary medicine. **The ACT and SFT believe that companion animals not intended for breeding should be spayed or neutered; however, both organizations believe that the decision to spay or neuter a pet must be made on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the pet's age, breed, sex, intended use, household environment and temperament. The use of generalized rules concerning gonadectomy (removal of the ovaries or testes) is not in the best interest of the health or well-being of the pets or their owners.** Each of the following considerations must be assessed for each individual animal and household.

- 1) Health concerns
  - a. Research has shown that there can be positive effects of the sex steroid hormones. The sex steroids are hormones produced by the ovaries and testes, and are only present in intact males and females. Gonadectomy at any age deprives the body of the positive health effects of these hormones. Although in most cases, the benefits of spay-neuter outweigh the benefits of exposure to the sex steroids, this is not true in all cases. Since gonadectomy prior to puberty or sexual maturity may make the risks of some diseases higher in certain breeds or individuals, the option to leave an animal intact must be available to the pet owner.
    - i. Advantages of remaining intact:
      1. There is a decreased incidence of hemangiosarcoma in intact bitches and dogs.
      2. There is a decreased incidence of osteosarcoma in intact male and female dogs.
      3. There is a decreased risk of transitional cell carcinoma in intact dogs and bitches.
      4. There is a decreased risk of prostatic adenocarcinoma in intact male dogs compared to gonadectomized male dogs.
      5. There is a decreased incidence of obesity in intact male and female dogs and cats, which may be due at least partly to increased metabolic rate.
      6. There is a decreased incidence of urinary incontinence in intact bitches (equivocal if bitches are spayed after 5 months but before their first heat).
      7. There may be a reduced incidence of urinary tract infection in intact bitches.
      8. There may be a reduced incidence of feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD) in intact male and female cats which may be partly due to decreased obesity in these animals.
      9. There may be a reduced incidence of autoimmune thyroiditis and hypothyroidism in intact male and female dogs.
      10. There is a decreased incidence of diabetes mellitus in intact female cats and a possibly reduced incidence in diabetes mellitus in intact male dogs.
      11. There is a reduced incidence of cranial cruciate rupture in intact male and female dogs.
      12. There may be a reduced incidence of hip dysplasia in male and female dogs that are not gonadectomized before 5 months of age.
      13. There may be an increased incidence of capital physeal fractures in castrated male cats that may be partially due to increased weight gain in gonadectomized males.
    - b. Research has shown that there are a number of detrimental effects of the sex steroid hormones. Spaying and neutering will remove these hormones and thus lower the risk of these conditions.
      - i. Advantages of being spayed or castrated:
        1. There is an increased risk of mammary, testicular, and ovarian neoplasia in intact male and female dogs and cats.



similar problems exist.

- a. Provide increased jurisdictional control to the AVMA Governmental Relations division, Animal Welfare Committee, and the APHIS-Animal Care division.
- b. Ensure suppliers to pet stores are providing adequate care for breeding stock and offspring.
- c. Support programs to expand the public awareness of pet overpopulation, acceptable breeding standards, and responsibilities of pet ownership. Provide the public a means to access assistance with concerns of pet health, ownership, behavior and management issues.
- d. Work with state and local rescue and humane societies to assemble accurate data on causes for relinquishment of dogs and cats to enable these organizations, federal and local governments, and veterinary organizations to address the fundamental causes of abandonment.
- e. Provide low cost spay/neuter facilities for economically disadvantaged persons and communities.
- f. Continue to work on reduction of feral cat populations.
- g. Establish programs to ensure access of breeders to proper reproductive care and counseling.
- h. Provide local or federal governmental assistance to registered rescue organizations to facilitate placement of unwanted pets.

The ACT and SFT do not believe that **mandatory** spay/neuter programs will significantly reduce the pet overpopulation problems, since most animals that are abandoned are relinquished because of behavior, health, economic and life changing conditions and not due to their reproductive status. In fact, in some European Union countries where gonadectomy is illegal unless deemed medically necessary (such as Norway) there are no significant problems with pet overpopulation, indicating that the pet overpopulation problem that exists in the United States is due to cultural differences on the importance of pets, the responsibility of pet owners, and the ability of the government and national agencies to properly educate the public. Although both organizations believe that most companion animals should be spayed or neutered, the ACT and SFT also strongly believe that it is not in the best interest of the animals to produce legislation regarding medical treatments. Therefore, both organizations oppose **mandatory** spay/neuter programs.

There are hundreds of references which provide scientific information on the effects of spay and neuter in both dogs and cats. We chose to provide the reader with a selected list of them. This reference list was compiled by Dr. Peggy Root-Kustritz, DACT.

## References