

# EARLY NEUTERING AND SPAYING

## How young is too young to alter?

### Q:

*My new kitten is 12 weeks old. When I had her at the veterinarian for her vaccinations, I asked if I could schedule her spay appointment. I was told I had to wait until she was 6 months of age. This age requirement contradicts what I've heard. Is my veterinarian behind the times?*

### A:

In short, yes. Traditionally, veterinarians have waited until cats are at least 6 months old before neutering them. But research shows that healthy kittens can be safely neutered at 6 weeks, or as soon as they weigh 2 pounds. Referred to as early-age, pediatric, or pre-pubertal spay/neuter, the procedure eliminates any chance of an “oops litter” since female cats can become pregnant as young as 4 months of age.

Early-age spay and neuter is safe. Endorsed by the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners, early-age spay/neuter surgery (and the anesthesia associated with it) show no adverse effects on animals both in short- and long-term studies.

## Age

Before neutering or spaying, kittens must weigh at least 2 or 3 pounds, depending on the preference of the veterinary practice or spay/neuter facility performing the surgery. Neutering/spaying smaller kittens may result in difficulty manipulating the tissue during the operation. Most male kittens weigh 2 pounds by the age of 6 weeks and 3 pounds by the time they are 8 to 9 weeks old.

## Advantages

“Pre-pubertal neutering is the best-kept secret in veterinary medicine. Once veterinarians try it, they will love it. Prepubes have a much lower complication rate, surgical time and will save vets both time and money while guaranteeing that our companion animal friends will never reproduce. Pre-pubertal surgery is simply a win-win situation for all parties involved” said Dr. Jeff Young, a leading veterinarian in the field of high-volume spay/neuter who established Colorado’s Planned Pethood Plus Inc. In 1990.

There are many benefits to cats of early-age spay/neuter. Veterinarians who perform the surgery report that it is an easier, faster procedure; the patients recover quickly; it is the best way to prevent litters; and it is cost-effective. Research shows that kittens neutered before 12 weeks of age have fewer complications from surgery than those over 12 weeks.

## Recovery

Also, kittens rebound much faster after the surgical procedure, with less stress than their counterparts over 6 months old. Becky Robinson, the founder of Alley Cat Allies, cites research that kittens neutered prior to reaching 12 weeks of age have fewer complications from surgery than kittens older

than 12 weeks. Recovery for kittens is usually minimal -- your boy may not realize he's missing anything, and he's home from surgery the same day. If you bathe your cat, don't wash him for at least two weeks after the operation so the incision can completely heal.

Early-age spay/neuter has a positive impact beyond your cat at home. Shelters should neuter before adoption to ensure that 100 percent of animals leaving their facilities are sterilized. When they neuter all kittens before going to homes, they guarantee that there is zero opportunity to reproduce — even in the youngest animals adopted. Additionally, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' guidelines recommend neutering before cats reach sexual maturity.

Both the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Feline Practitioners endorse pediatric spaying and neutering. For veterinarians, the procedure is easier than working on a mature cat, with kittens recovering from the surgery more quickly than males neutered at the traditional later age. While animal shelters often require adopters to spay or neuter kittens and may offer discounts or certificates for the surgery, many people do not follow up with it. Shelters adopting out kittens already spayed or neutered do not have to follow up with adopters to ensure compliance. These kittens won't be making unwanted babies of their own.