

Spay Surgery, From Start to Finish

What you need to know about this important procedure.

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You recently brought home a wonderful female puppy, and now you need to bring her to a veterinarian for spay surgery. What will happen during the procedure? How long will your puppy be gone? And most importantly, will she feel pain?

We've enlisted several animal welfare organizations including the Humane Society of the United States, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the American Veterinary Medical Association to answer all the questions you may have about this important procedure. For additional information, please talk to your veterinarian.

When should I spay my dog? Before her first heat cycle at 4 to 6 months of age, however animals of any age can be surgically altered. Some veterinarians perform juvenile or early-age spay at 8 to 16 weeks of age.

What are the benefits of spaying my dog? Helps prevent unwanted litters. Decreases your dog's chance of developing mammary cancer, which is fatal in 50 percent of cases. Eliminates the chances of other reproductive cancers and deadly uterine infections. Eliminates messy heat cycles and associated negative behaviors such as yowling, anxiety and urination in unacceptable places.

What happens during the surgery? Your veterinarian sedates your dog and puts her under general anesthesia. The attending staff monitors her breathing and heart rate. The surgeon makes a small incision in her belly area and removes the ovaries, fallopian tubes and uterus. The veterinarian closes the incision with surgical glue or sutures.

Is the surgery painful? Your dog feels no pain while under general anesthesia during and immediately following the procedure. Talk to your veterinarian about pain medication for post-operative discomfort.

Are there any risks associated with spay surgery? While spay surgery can be considered major surgery because it involves entering the abdomen, veterinarians consider the procedure very safe and even routine. Your veterinarian takes many precautions to ensure your dog's safety during the procedure. Pre-anesthesia blood work assesses your dog's liver and kidney function because these organs break down and remove anesthesia from the body after surgery. Next Step: Is It Expensive?