Six to eight million animals are cared for in animal shelters across the country each year, the Humane Society of the United States estimates. Of these, only half of these animals are adopted, while the remainder are euthanized. The problem is overwhelming, but there is one simple solution that can make it more manageable. Having your pets “fixed” will, in the long run, reduce pet overpopulation, as well as improving many behavior problems and it may even help animals live longer, healthier lives.

Benefits of Spaying:

• **Pregnancy prevention.** This is the most obvious effect of spaying, or the surgical removal of a female animal’s reproductive organs. As such, spayed animals will no longer have spotting during heat cycles. In some breeds, avoiding an unwanted pregnancy also means eliminating the possibility of costly Cesarean sections. The animal will be less likely escape, roam or attract unneutered males as well.

• **Reduced risk of health problems.** The risk of mammary gland, ovarian and uterine tumors is reduced or even eliminated, especially if the procedure is done before the first heat cycle. The possibility of uterine infections, which can be costly to treat and potentially fatal, also disappears when an animal is spayed.

Benefits of Neutering:

• **Reduced risk of health problems.** Neutering, or castration, is the surgical removal of a male animal’s testicles. The health benefits of neutering include eliminating the risk of testicular cancer as well as decreasing the incidence of prostate disease and tumors that occur in this area.

• **Behavior.** Males will benefit from being “fixed” even more than females. A neutered male will have a significantly decreased desire to roam, thereby decreasing the possibility of injury from being hit by cars, getting into fights or getting lost. Intact males have the inclination to mark their territory with urinations and will fight to defend it, whereas neutered males are generally less territorial and aggressive. Neutering can also decrease or even eliminate mounting of inappropriate objects and decrease aggressive behavior, including biting.

**myths & concerns**

Many pet owners express concern about the procedure itself, including the anesthesia used during surgery. Common concerns and misconceptions include:

• **Complications from anesthesia.** Veterinarians often perform pre-anesthetic blood screening and monitor the animal’s heart rate and respiration to decrease the risk of anesthetic complications.

• **Cost.** The cost of the surgery is also a deterrent for some; however, in the long run, it is less costly to spay or neuter than it is to incur the expenses associated with puppy exams and vaccinations, possible C-sections, and the cost involved to treat associated medical problems that may occur with intact pets.

• **Weight problems post-surgery.** Another misconception is that spayed or neutered animals tend to be overweight. Having your pet “fixed” will not cause it to become fat and lazy; an out-of-shape pet results from inactivity and poor feeding habits.

The medical and behavioral benefits of having your pets spayed or neutered far outweigh the slight risks involved. Talk with your veterinarian about any concerns you may have as well as the appropriate timing to have your pet “fixed.”