Most male animals that are kept for companionship, work, or food production (horses, dogs, cats, bulls, boars) are neutered unless they are intended to be used as breeding stock. This is a common practice to prevent unacceptable sexual behavior, reduce aggressiveness, and prevent accidental or indiscriminate breeding. The intact male (tomcat) is likely to roam, fight with other males, spray urine and is, of course, strongly attracted to seek out and mate with intact females. Tomcat urine is particularly odorous. For this reason the intact male cat can make a most unpleasant household companion.
**How does castration affect behavior?**

The main behaviors affected by castration are those under the most direct influence of male hormones (sexually dimorphic behaviors). A cat's temperament, training, and personality are strongly influenced by its genetic make up and upbringing, and are not affected to a great deal by the presence or absence of male hormones. Castration will not usually calm a generally overactive cat or decrease aggression toward people. Since the male brain is masculinised by the time of birth, castration will reduce some, but not all of the sexually dimorphic male behaviors. If performed prior to sexual maturity castration will help to prevent the development of secondary sexual characteristics such as penile barbs, large jowls and glands around the base of the cat's tail.

**What is neutering?**

Neutering or castration of male cats involves general anaesthesia, and an incision is made over each side of the scrotal sac so that each testicle can be excised. External sutures are not generally required. In males both testicles usually descend within the first 10 weeks from inside the abdominal cavity through the inguinal canal into the scrotal sac. In some cats one or both testicles do not descend fully into the sac and may either remain in the abdomen or anywhere along the inguinal canal path to the scrotal sac. These cats are called cryptorchid and more extensive surgery will be required to locate the testicles and remove them. If these testicles are not removed they will continue to produce hormones and the behavior problems associated with intact male cats. A vasectomy is not normally performed in cats as this does not remove the testicles. It is the combination of sterilisation and removal of the male hormones that produce the behavioral benefits of castration.

**What are the benefits of neutering?**

- **Population control**

  Thousands of cats are destroyed each year because there are far more cats born than homes available. A single male cat can father many litters so that neutering of intact males is essential for population control. Although sexual desire will be greatly reduced by castration, some experienced males may continue to show sexual interest in females.

- **Spraying**

  The most common behavior problem in cats of all ages is indoor elimination at locations other than the litter tray. A large number of these cases are cats that spray or mark walls and other vertical household objects. Adult male cats have an extremely strong urge to mark territory, both indoors and out. Neutering reduces or eliminates spraying in approximately 85% of male cats.

- **Aggression**

  Cats, whether neutered or intact, can get into fights but more inter-cat aggression is seen between intact males. This is a direct result of competition between male cats, who tend to roam and protect a much larger territory. If these fights lead to punctures that penetrate the skin abscesses are a common sequel. Neutering reduces fighting and the risk of abscesses in male cats.

- **Roaming and Sexual Attraction**

  Intact males have much larger territories and wander over much greater distances than females and neutered males. The urge to roam may be particularly strong during mating season. Castration reduces roaming in approximately 90% of cases. Neutering greatly reduces sexual interest, but some experienced males may continue to be attracted to, and mate with females.

- **Physical Changes**

  Male urine odour is particularly strong and pungent. Castration leads to a change to a more normal urine odour. Many owners claim that their intact males become much cleaner, less odorous, and better self-groomers after neutering. Abscess formation as a result of fighting is far less frequent and some of the secondary sexual characteristics such as the over-productive tail glands in the condition known as "stud tail" can be dramatically improved.
**Does neutering lead to any adverse effects on health or behavior?**

There are many misconceptions about the effects of neutering on health and behavior. Neutered males are no more likely to become fat or lazy provided they receive a proper diet and adequate exercise. With less roaming and fighting and mating, calorie intake may have to be reduced and alternative forms of play and activity provided. Behaviors that have developed independent of hormonal influences such as hunting are not affected. Although neutering prior to puberty appears to have similar effects to neutering post-puberty, every attempt should be made to neuter prior to puberty before the cat develops problem behaviors.

*FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE CONSULT YOUR VETERINARY SURGEON*

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