



Best Age to Desex Your Pet

For many years desexing of pets has been promoted by the veterinary profession as a part of responsible pet ownership. The AVA (Australian Veterinary Association) policy on Desexing of companion animals (<http://www.ava.com.au/policy/67-desexing-surgical-sterilisation-companion-animals>) identifies the benefits of desexing as:

- Desexing helps control companion animal populations and may have behavioral and health benefits. It is currently the only widely available effective and permanent method of preventing breeding.
- Desexing can reduce behavioral problems such as free-ranging and some aggressive behaviour, which can cause public nuisance. In cats, desexing stops calling behaviour in queens, reduces spraying in toms, reduces fighting, abscesses and transmission of infectious diseases.
- It is commonly accepted that desexed females have a greatly reduced incidence of mammary neoplasia.
- Diseases of the ovaries and uterus are eliminated, however evidence suggests that bitches desexed prior to 20 weeks of age may have a statistically increased incidence of urinary incontinence compared to those desexed later.

- Testicular tumours in males are eliminated, and there is a reduced incidence of prostate disease, perianal tumours and perineal hernias.

Traditionally desexing has been recommended at approximately 5-6 months of age. Over 10 years ago animal shelters and some breeders adopted early age desexing protocols, primarily to counter risks of failure of owners to comply with recommendations/agreements to desex at 6 months of age. There are risks and benefits to early age desexing. In our practice we believe the increased risks of:

- Infantile external genitalia
- delayed growth plate closure
- and the potential for associated orthopaedic conditions (including angular limb deformities, hip dysplasia, and cranial cruciate ligament disease) in dogs
- urinary incontinence in the bitch if desexed before 20 weeks of age

outweigh the benefits of faster surgery time, lower anaesthetic dose and faster healing.

We do not routinely recommend early age desexing at our practice.

More recently there has been discussion and studies around risks and benefits of delaying desexing. Mature desexing can be defined as anything greater than 9 months of age. There

does appear that there may be some breeds (or perhaps as specific as genetic lines) that would benefit in having desexing delayed until growth plates have closed. The information is still very sketchy and hard to assess in terms of the impact on length and quality of life. We feel there is currently not enough evidence to suggest that the benefits outweigh the risks when compared to juvenile desexing for the majority of the pets that we see. A case may be made for individual animals.

In line with our Values of being Passionate and Caring, acting with Integrity and Teamwork, sharing knowledge through great communication... **we believe that for the majority of dogs and cats the optimal time to desex is prior to the onset of puberty at approximately 5.5 – 6 months of age.**

There may be situations where individual pet needs indicate different optimal desexing times for certain animals.

Including:

- Male Large breed dogs – More information is required before a generalized Large Breed recommendation can be made. There is supporting evidence for German Shepherds to consider leaving until growth plates have closed. Optimally X-ray regularly to monitor. Otherwise desex at 15 months.
- Aggressive Dog – consider desexing ASAP
- Female with incontinence – consider allowing first heat before desexing
- Please be aware that although these recommendations vary from our standard recommendation. Our main and general recommendation is still that pets should be desexed between 5.5 - 6 months of age.