

Public Education needed to encourage spay/neutering of pets.

There are common misconceptions about fixing pets such as:

- The cost is too high.
- It will change my pet's personality.
- It will diminish my pet's intelligence or ability to learn and play.
- It will cause my pet to become overweight.
- I should wait until my female dog/cat has a litter before spaying.
- Spaying/Neutering is not safe for my pet.
- Neutering will make my pet feel like less of a male. (Emasculate them)
- My pet will mourn the loss of its reproductive capabilities.
- I won't be able to show my pet if I have them spayed or neutered.
- Spaying or neutering my pet will cause it unnecessary pain.
- Indoor pets don't need to be spayed or neutered.

The Cost is Too High

Spaying and neutering are actually very affordable surgeries. And, in most communities, there are low-cost or free spay-and-neuter clinics meaning everyone can have access to the procedures. Compared to the cost of having and caring for a litter (or worse, taking a litter to the shelter), spaying and neutering is definitely a more cost-effective and compassionate choice.

It Will Change My Pet's Personality

Spaying and neutering have no impact on your pet's personality. The procedures will reduce or eliminate some undesirable behaviors (aggression, urine marking, roaming, etc.). Furthermore, it often increases your pets' interest in you since they will no longer be focused on finding a mate!

It Will Diminish My Pets' Intelligence or Ability to Learn and Play

The procedures have no effect at all on your pets' cognitive abilities. They will continue to engage, interact and learn new things as they did before spaying or neutering.

It Will Cause My Pet to Become Overweight

Pets become overweight – just like people – when they are inactive, eat too much and exercise too little, not because they are spayed/neutered. Your pets will stay fit and trim if you control their food intake and make sure they get regular exercise.

I Should Wait Until My Female Dog or Cat Has One Litter Before Spaying

It is actually best to spay females before they are sexually mature because spaying reduces the risk of certain cancers in female dogs and cats by as much as 85%.

Spaying and Neutering is Not Safe

These procedures are now the most common surgeries performed by veterinarians. Your pet will experience relatively little pain and discomfort and will be back to normal activities within a few days in most cases.

Spaying and neutering is also associated with increased health benefits and longevity. But if you're a first-time pet parent, you may have heard or read statements that give you pause. Neutering my dog will alter his personality. Spaying a female cat before a first litter is dangerous. Spay and neuter surgeries are unaffordable. If you're not sure what to believe, talk to your veterinarian who is intimately connected with the issue help separate fact from fiction. As with human medicine, animals are unique individuals, which is why the best person to talk to about your pet's health needs is, of course, your vet.

Neutering will make my pet feel like less of a male (de-masculate)

Pets do not have any concept of ego or sexual identity, and neutering won't change that. What might change, however, is that your male dog will be less likely to roam away from home! An intact male will do just about anything to find a mate, including finding creative ways to escape from the house. Once he's free to roam, he risks injury in traffic and fights with other male animals.

Similarly, spayed female pets won't go into heat. While cycles can vary, female felines usually go into heat four to five days every three weeks during breeding season. In an effort to advertise for mates, they'll yowl and urinate more frequently—sometimes all over the house!

Spay/neuter operations will help curb these behaviors and keep your pet where he or she belongs: in your safe and loving home.

My pet will mourn the loss of its reproductive capabilities.

This is entirely false. Like most animals, pets reproduce solely on instinct – to ensure the survival of their species. They have feelings but they can't rationalize them to pine after offspring they haven't had and will not be affected by not being able to have kittens/puppies. Bitches/queens will only nurse their puppies/kittens for the two months after their birth, to make sure they are fed, clean and learn the ground rules in life. Meanwhile, male cats/dogs do not even recognize kittens/puppies as their own.

I won't be able to show my pet if I have them spayed or neutered.

False. Changes in the Kennel Club regulations mean that neutered pedigree dogs can be shown.

Spaying or neutering my pet will cause it unnecessary pain.

All surgical procedures involve a degree of discomfort, but neutering is carried out under a full general anesthetic and animals are given drugs to control any discomfort afterwards. Most animals are up and about just a few hours after the surgery and back to normal within a few days. Neutering a male pet is a quick procedure with a very short recovery time, while your female pet will need a little more rest after being spayed as the incision is larger.

Indoor pets don't need to be spayed or neutered

Sexual maturity in animals is a risky business. At this stage in an animal's development, behavior can become territorial, and/or unpredictable.

Spay and neuter operations reduce the hormones that trigger these behaviors. Spayed and neutered pets exhibit fewer territorial or aggressive tendencies and enjoy a more relaxed quality of life.

Additionally, there is no guarantee that your pet will not at some point dash out of an open door unexpectedly and go on an adventure without you, especially if they are in heat and in search of a potential mate. Spaying or neutering your pet guarantees that even in unpredictable cases, they will not be able to mate.

Fresno's feral cat problem is about to get worse with no trap-neuter services



COURTESY FRESNO T.N.R.

Three cats trapped by Fresno T.N.R. co-founder Brandi Sherman await transport to an animal clinic to be sterilized. The group successfully trapped, fixed and returned some 2,850 community cats in 2022.

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Fresno has a feral and stray cat problem. And the problem has never been more dire.

Yes, California's fifth-largest city has larger and more pressing issues than unowned cats living outdoors and multiplying. I need not list any, since everyone reading this can rattle off four or five without blinking or thinking.

To control community cat populations, many animal organizations and feline lovers believe in [Trap-](#)

[Neuter-Return](#) as the most humane and effective method. Instead of being euthanized, they're caught, sterilized by a veterinarian and returned to their familiar surroundings.

[Fresno Humane Animal Services](#) also has a TNR policy. But as of March 1, the contracted animal services provider for both the city of Fresno and Fresno County is no longer offering this service for feral and stray cats. Neither are other local organizations including HOPE Animal Foundation, Valley Animal Center and Central California SPCA.

Why not?

"We simply don't have the resources at this time," said Angyla Brumm, the animal services supervisor for FHAS. "It's a vet shortage, not a lack of support for TNR."

According to Brumm, FHAS has spent the last nine or 10 months unsuccessfully trying to hire veterinarians for the city's newly built [\\$20 million animal shelter](#) near Fresno Yosemite International Airport as well as the county's new facility between Highway 180 and Belmont Memorial Park.

In recent months, FHAS contracted with [Valley Animal Center](#) to provide spay and neuter services for dogs and cats. However, the backlog is so high — one VAC employee told me it started at 1,000 animals — there's no capacity for ferals.

[HOPE Animal Foundation](#) used to provide five appointments per day on a first-come, first-serve basis. However, a sign currently posted on the clinic's front door says they "will no longer be offering feral cat sterilization" and advises interested parties to "contact your local animal control or other animal hospitals."

That wouldn't be [Central California SPCA](#), either. Spokesperson Walter Salvari said by law his organization cannot take in strays now that it is no longer (as [of July 2022](#)) the city's designated animal control agency. Furthermore, the CCSPCA "does not advocate for TNR or allowing community cats to run rampant in the Central Valley."

NONPROFITS, PRIVATE RESIDENTS DRIVE TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN

The only current sterilization option for feral and stray cats is private veterinarians that charge a couple hundred bucks or more if it's a pregnant female. (FHAS charged \$25 and HOPE \$65 when they offered the service.) Furthermore, private vets typically require a health exam prior to the procedure as well as an appointment, both of which are nearly impossible with a nearly-impossible-to-handle trapped cat.

"People want to do the right thing, but when it's going to cost them \$150 or \$200 a pop they're not going to," said Pam Kelly, founder of the nonprofit [Feral Felines of Fresno](#).

One thing I've learned while reporting on this topic is the number of residents who care about

community cats and want to help control their numbers by means other than euthanization.

One of them is Brandi Sherman of [Fresno T.N.R.](#), a two-person outfit responsible for spaying and neutering some 2,850 cats in 2022 alone. The group is funded by [Dogwood Animal Rescue](#), a nonprofit based in Santa Rosa.

Sherman, a former vet tech who now works nights in a human hospital, said Fresno's community cat problem stems from both irresponsible humans (i.e. people who feed cat colonies or leave their pets behind when they move) and misinformation (i.e. people who mistakenly believe female cats must have a litter before they can be safely fixed).

"Fresno is focused on dogs, but on cats not so much," Sherman said. "I don't like going out and catching a bunch of cats only for them to get euthanized because they were sick and we can't save them. That's not fun."

Private citizens also take matters into their own hands. One Fresno resident told me that between her and a neighbor, they have paid for the sterilization of 42 feral cats in their neighborhood since 2021 — at \$65 apiece.

Another, Ann Adams, said she noticed the severe overpopulation of homeless and unfixed cats shortly after moving from the Bay Area two years ago. She and a neighbor have since paid to fix 20-25 cats, but don't know where to turn now that animal hospitals are no longer accepting them.

'BY MAY WE COULD HAVE THOUSANDS OF KITTENS BORN'

"This closure of all four of the previous feral/community cat vet locations for spay and neutering is going to drastically set Fresno back on the slow progress we were making as civilians," Adams said via email.

"This time of year is when cats reproduce; by May we could have thousands of kittens born on the street if we can't fix any cats for the next two to three months. The timing could not be worse."

Ironically, Fresno [last month launched](#) a low- and no-cost spay and neuter program for domesticated dogs and cats. To date, the city has received more than 3,000 calls from the public.

While acknowledging the lack of services for feral cats, Fresno City Manager Georgeanne White said the city has "dramatically" increased public outreach by assigning two full-time employees to the duties of increasing fostering and adoptions.

Sherman questioned that strategy.

“Fresno is trying to rescue their way out of this, but that’s not going to work,” she said. “TNR is the only way to make a dent in the problem.”

There is no disagreement about [the shortage of veterinarians](#), not just in Fresno but nationwide. The profession has been plagued not just by high turnover but high rates of suicide compared to the general population, according to [a 2018 CDC study](#).

In the city’s 2023 budget, \$9,895,000 was set aside to cover all operational and equipment costs for both the new animal center and legally mandated services such as dog licensing, vaccinations and catching.

However, it’s not a lack of money that has contributed to the feral cat problem, according to Brumm of FHAS, who hopes to reopen public TNR service “in a couple months.” It’s the lack of staff and other resources.

“We’ll try to help anyone who contacts us about feral cats,” she said, “but it’s not going to be right away.”

The problem is about to get worse.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Each day over 70,000 puppies and kittens are born in the US, and because of overpopulation, more than 3.7 million animals are still being euthanized yearly in shelters across the country. YOU CAN HELP.

Unspayed/Unneutered Cats & Kittens:

This chart represents one unspayed female, her mate and all her offspring, producing 2 litters per year, with 2.8 surviving kittens per litter. By spaying and neutering just one male and one female cat, more than 2,000 unwanted births can be prevented in just four years - more than 2,000,000 in 8 years!

1 year:	12
2 years:	67
3 years:	376
4 years:	2,107
5 years:	11,801
6 years:	66,088
7 years:	370,092
8 years:	2,072,514

Prevent A Litter - Spay and Neuter