

## Long-term risks and benefits of early-age gonadectomy in cats

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### Abstract

**Objective**—To evaluate the long-term risks and benefits of early-age gonadectomy, compared with traditional-age gonadectomy, among cats adopted from a large animal shelter.

**Design**—Retrospective cohort study.

**Animals**—1,660 cats.

**Procedure**—Cats underwent gonadectomy and were adopted from an animal shelter before 1 year of age; follow-up was available for as long as 11 years after surgery (median follow-up time, 3.9 years). Adopters completed a questionnaire about their cats' behavior and medical history. When possible, the cats' veterinary records were reviewed. Statistical analyses were conducted to identify any associations between the occurrence of 47 medical and behavioral conditions and the cats' age at gonadectomy.

**Results**—Among male cats that underwent early-age gonadectomy (< 5.5 months of age), the occurrence of abscesses, aggression toward veterinarians, sexual behaviors, and urine spraying was decreased, whereas hiding was increased, compared with cats that underwent gonadectomy at an older age. Among male and female cats that underwent early-age gonadectomy, asthma, gingivitis, and hyperactivity were decreased, whereas shyness was increased.

**Conclusions and Clinical Relevance**—Gonadectomy before 5.5 months of age was not associated with increased rates of death or relinquishment or occurrence of any serious medical or behavioral condition and may provide certain important long-term benefits, especially for male cats. Animal shelters can safely gonadectomize cats at a young age, and veterinarians should consider recommending routine gonadectomy for client-owned cats before the traditional age of 6 to 8 months. (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2004;224:372–379)

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