Feline Sterilization by five months of age is now the accepted normal

A recent national survey of veterinarians confirms that a majority of veterinarians now recommend sterilization of both male and female cats at or before five months of age. For decades veterinarians have recommended spay and neuter of cats at 6 months of age or older, but the veterinary literature does not document any scientific evidence justifying waiting until six months of age, after cats are sexually mature.

In 2016 a veterinary task force was established to reconsider the recommended age for spay and neuter of cats. This task force recommended that the age for spay and neuter be reduced to five months of age or lower. The consensus document from the task force stated that “current scientific evidence documents benefits of spaying kittens before the first estrous cycle, including the following:

- Decreased risk for mammary carcinoma (the 3rd most common cancer in cats)
- Elimination of reproductive emergencies such as pyometra and dystocia
- Avoidance of unintended pregnancies that may occur as early as 4 months of age
- Potential decrease in behavioral problems linked with cat relinquishment.”

The task force also recommended castration of male cats prior to five months of age as well. Castration prior to sexual maturity reduces sexual behaviors often cited as reasons for relinquishment to shelters; roaming, fighting, spraying to mark territory. The traditional belief that castration prior to sexual maturity may lead predispose to urinary obstruction in male cats has been disproven.

Subsequent to the report from the task force the Feline Fix by Five campaign was established in order to education veterinarians and the public on the new recommended age for sterilization. To date, the AVMA, AAHA, ASV, AAFP, 14 state veterinary associations and numerous humane organizations have endorsed the concept of spay neuter of cats by five months of age.

In early 2021 a national veterinary survey was conducted to determine if veterinarians were lowering the recommended age for sterilization of cats. The survey revealed that 61% of veterinarians were recommending ovariohysterectomy of female cats on or before five months of age and 51% were recommending castration of male cats on or before five months of age.

Results from national veterinary survey on recommended age of spay neuter of cats.