Feline Fertility Control

Decisions about fertility-control methods in cats are based on local veterinary resources and available techniques, cost, desire for permanent vs temporary solutions, individual and cultural beliefs, and legislation. Owner demographics and client education may also influence sterilization decisions.

A 2007 survey of United States households revealed that the most common explanations for not sterilizing cats were the belief that females should have a litter first, the cost of the procedure, or plans to breed the cat. In a 2013 United Kingdom study, owners most commonly did not believe in neutering or had not given it much thought. In Norway, routine surgical sterilization is prohibited. In Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Germany, removal of organs for the purpose of convenience to humans is discouraged. In Belgium, neutering of all cats, other than those used for breeding, is required.

All fertility-control options have advantages and disadvantages.

Nonsurgical sterilitant options are not permanent. Oral products used in bait systems for free-roaming cats present concerns regarding proper dosing and safety for nontarget animals. Products used long term and/or in high doses may have adverse effects (eg, endometrial hyperplasia or endometrial cancer, pyometra, glucose intolerance, diabetes mellitus, adrenocortical suppression, mammary tumors).

Surgical options, which are generally irreversible, can be costly and time-consuming. They are associated with operative risk and postoperative recovery time. The authors note that veterinarians must consider all factors influencing sterilization decisions as more nonsurgical options become available.

Commentary

As practitioners in the United States, we often forget that the number one factor in a client’s willingness to sterilize a pet is her or his own knowledge of or philosophy about sterilization. It is important to understand human behavior and multicultural attitudes and to offer a variety of options. Attention to cost and technique is also important. Social context, cultural norms, economic factors, and legislation can all influence the success of any sterilization program, especially for foster and rescue agencies.—Heather Troyer, DVM, DABVP, CVA, CVPP

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