

What to Expect for a Spay or Neuter

By Suzanne Trayhan

Everyone has read about the importance of spaying or neutering our beloved rabbits, and we all understand how critical it is. While there are many articles about why to spay or neuter, there isn't as much information out there about the process or what to expect.

The most important thing to do is to find a good rabbit savvy vet to do your surgery. Ideally, they should do several spays or neuters each month. A veterinarian with this much

experience may be more difficult to find in rural communities that are far from metropolitan areas. Your rabbit should have a regular checkup first. Your vet will want to examine your bunny and make sure they are healthy enough for the procedure. This is also a good time for you to meet the veterinarian and make sure you feel comfortable with them. Your veterinarian may suggest pre-surgical blood work. The liver and kidneys metabolize the anesthetic drugs that are used; making sure they are

functioning normally will make anesthesia safer. Some people also opt for lab work because it can be helpful to have a baseline of your rabbit's values to compare to later in life. That said, finding problems in younger rabbits is rare and many people choose to skip the blood work. It is

recommended for older rabbits.

Age is another important factor when getting your rabbit fixed. Pediatric spays and neuters are controversial in rabbits. There is an ongoing debate as to whether it is healthy for the rabbits and the fact is we really

don't have much data on this. Also every veterinarian has different comfort levels. If your rabbit is under 6 months, discuss with your vet when the procedure should be done. For male rabbits, there are different procedures and most vets prefer that the testicles have descended first. For older rabbits, especially if they are over 8 years old, you will need to discuss the overall health of your rabbit versus the risks of surgery. If a senior rabbit is not in great health, your veterinarian may



Monty just after his neuter

recommend leaving them intact as the surgery may be more risky than the possibility of reproductive tract disease in the long term.

Once your surgery is scheduled, the day before should be a normal day for your rabbit. It is important to never fast a rabbit. They should be given their normal meals. The morning of the surgery, as soon as I get up, I place some food in the cage so that they may eat some breakfast before leaving. I will also place hay in the carrier. Some people will bring their rabbit's regular hay, pellets, and greens with them to be fed post-surgery at the vet hospital, since the bunny may be more likely to eat familiar food. Most hospitals have specific drop off hours so please check with them to confirm what time you should arrive in the morning. Some hospitals have you take your carrier with you, while others have you leave it at the hospital. You may want to place a label with your last name and bunny's name on the carrier just to be sure. Lastly, make sure there is a phone number where they can reach you.

Two other things to check are the post-surgery follow up procedure and pick up

time. Some veterinarians will call you to let you know how the surgery went. Other hospitals prefer that you call them. If you are supposed to call them, there is usually a time at which they prefer you to call. I am sure you will be anxious to know how everything went, so check with the hospital staff about their protocols. Make sure you know what time the hospital closes that night, and what time you need to "pick up after". They prefer that your rabbit stay at the hospital for at least a few hours after the surgery so they may monitor them.

While your rabbit is at the hospital, you should clean their cage so they come home to a nice, clean place. This will also allow you to better monitor their poop. Make sure the cage is not in a cool, damp area (normal household area is fine). Place a small amount of food in



Bun Bun after her spay

the cage. It is tempting to put a lot of food in the cage, but that makes it harder to monitor how much they are eating. Better to put small amounts and replenish as needed. When you arrive home, gently place your rabbit in

their cage. This is a good time to check the incision so you know what it looks like. For spays, it should be a small, pink line on their bellies. For males,

depending on the procedure, it could be an incision on each testicle, or a small line in the abdomen next to the genitals. Keep an eye on your bunny but don't pester them. You want to see them moving around a little, and you want to see them nibble on some food. You may also notice some "grease" around their eyes. This is normal as the eyes are coated with an ointment during surgery to protect them. Expect them to be a little groggy or out of it, but not too groggy.

We all know the importance of having our bunnies eating and pooping. Right after surgery do not expect to have them eating normally. The important thing is to at least see them nibbling at food that night. The second day, you want to see them eating at least half what they normally eat, and producing at least half the normal number of poops, although they may be smaller than usual. By the third day, they should be eating 75-80% of their normal intake and by the fourth day, things should be completely normal. You may want to supplement them with feedings of Critical Care. It is a fine balance though, because you also don't want them fighting with you, stressing them (and you) out and possibly ripping open their incisions.

Pain management is a critical component to their surgical care. Ideally, you should be sent home with pain medication for 2-4 days. Follow the instructions given by your veterinarian. You should also monitor the

incision site, checking it once a day (more frequently if you suspect problems). Look for any signs of infection or your rabbit chewing it open. It can be normal to feel small bumps from the underlying sutures. If a bump is marble size or larger, it should be checked out. Contact your veterinarian about any problems you notice. In a typical spay there are dissolvable sutures underneath and surgical glue is used to seal the skin. If your veterinarian followed that protocol, you will not need to return to have any stitches removed. Depending on where your bun is in the shed cycle, it could take a few months for the fur to grow back or just a few weeks. This is normal and nothing to be concerned with.

This can be difficult for the buns, but ideally they should stay in the cage for a week. After a week you can start to let them run and explore again. While we want them moving around, we also want them quiet so that they don't rip open their incisions. You should try to keep them from jumping for at least a week. If you are thinking of bonding your rabbit, you should wait at least 3 weeks post-surgery, to make sure they are completely healed.

A common question is, "How much does a spay or neuter cost?" There is a wide range of prices that are constantly changing, so it is really hard to nail down a number. It varies from hospital to hospital and also where you live. If you

call around to compare prices, make sure you ask if the price includes a pre-surgery checkup and blood work. That way you are comparing fairly across different hospitals. Also realize that rabbit experience and a good safety record, although not quantifiable financially, are highly important.

Now it is time to get your bunny fixed!

Quick Check List:

- Find a good rabbit savvy vet
- Pre-surgery Checkup
- Schedule Surgery
- Label carrier
- Place small amount of hay in carrier
- Drop off time
- Post-surgery follow up time
- Pick up time
- Make sure bun is eating
- Monitor incision
- Keep caged for a week

