

Points on Pets: The birds and bees of cats

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Our children were given a kitten several months ago. At the time we did not even know the sex of the cat. We are now pretty sure that our cat is a female. Because our cat roams the neighborhood freely most of the time we are concerned that she might get pregnant. How will we know when she is old enough to breed? As you can tell, we are very ignorant about reproduction in cats. Can cats get pregnant once per month like humans can?

A: The reproductive cycles of cats are quite different than those in humans. Cats are not reproductively active all of the time. Cats are seasonal breeders. This means that they are reproductively active while the length of daylight is maximum and the average environmental temperatures are relatively warm. Depending on the particular geographical area in which the cat lives, most begin to have reproductive cycles when the amount of daylight begins to lengthen in January. Cycles tend to recur through September when the amount of daylight begins to shorten significantly. Therefore, between September and January in most parts of the United States most cats are reproductively inactive. Most cats become reproductively active at about five to 12 months of age.

During the periods when a female cat is reproductively receptive to a male, her personality and behavior changes greatly. Many receptive cats are thought to be in agony or pain because of their long mournful cries. Many first time cat owners mistake these cries and bizarre behavior as signs of serious illness. Fortunately, veterinarians can treat cats early in their receptive periods to eliminate this unpleasant behavior if breeding is not planned. The unpleasant behavior also ends very quickly after a cat is bred.

You should take your cat to a veterinarian for a complete physical examination. Your veterinarian can outline a complete wellness program designed for your particular cat. This will include recommended immunizations, internal and external parasite prevention methods, and a proper diet. If you do not want kittens you should have your cat spayed as soon as possible. This will eliminate your worry about her getting pregnant and the problem of finding homes for a litter of kittens.

Q: We recently noticed that our 6-month-old puppy has only one testicle! Because he has long hair, we had not noticed this before now. Is this a problem? Should we take our puppy to our veterinarian? We do not ever want puppies from this guy. He is just a lovable mutt!

A: You definitely should have your puppy examined by your veterinarian. Retention of a testicle in the abdomen beyond three months of age is abnormal in dogs. Your veterinarian will likely recommend that your dog be castrated. This will require surgery to remove the testicle retained in the dog's abdomen.

The surgery to remove a retained testicle is more complicated than a routine castration. However, leaving the retained testicle in your dog's abdomen will increase his chance of developing cancer later in life. Your

veterinarian can give you additional advice about how to handle your dog's abnormality.

Send e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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