

Living with an Intact Male Cat

The BC SPCA normally requires that all cats, dogs, and rabbits receive spay or neuter surgery prior to adoption. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, veterinarians in some communities have stopped offering elective surgical services, including spay/neuter. Therefore, it has become necessary to adopt animals out before they have been spayed or neutered, and allow owners to take them in for spay/neuter when regular vet services resume in their communities.

Living with an intact (not spayed or neutered) cat can present some challenges, outlined below. It may take several months for normal spay/neuter services to resume in our community, so adopters need to be prepared for the possibility of living with an intact animal for months.

Cat overpopulation is still a very serious animal welfare concern in BC, so please take the earliest opportunity to have your new cat neutered when elective vet services are available again.

Age and Time of Sexual Maturity

Cats reach sexual maturity between 5-9 months of age, which is when you may start to notice hormonally-driven behaviour problems. This is also when you need to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies. As the first heat can occur earlier in some cases, we recommend keeping intact male and female kittens separated from each other starting at ~4 months of age.

Special Considerations for Living with an Intact Male Cat

No Outdoor Access

It is important to keep intact male cats strictly indoors, unless you have an outdoor enclosure such as a catio, or if they are trained to walk on a harness and leash. Intact male cats with outdoor access are at high risk of causing unwanted pregnancies, fighting with other cats, and becoming lost due to roaming behaviour.

No Contact Between Intact Males and Females

It is impossible to keep intact males and female cats in the same home without a high risk of unwanted pregnancy. When female cats come into heat, intact males can become very forceful in their attempts to reach and mate females. Heat cycles are not always obvious, and female cats can be fertile before signs of heat are noticeable to owners. This complicates management strategies for keeping intact male and female cats apart during heat.

Urine Marking

Intact cats are at increased risk for urine marking. In male cats, urine marking usually looks like this: the cat approaches a vertical surface, sniffs it, turns around, points hind end towards surface, and sprays a small amount of urine in a strong stream that hits the vertical surface. The tail is raised and quivering, and the cat may be treading lightly with their front feet. Less commonly, male cats may urine mark with small amounts of urine on horizontal surfaces.

Urine marked areas should be cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner (multiple brands, available for purchase online or in pet supply stores) per package instructions. Keep multiple (number of cats in the house + 1) litter boxes in the home, clean them daily, and use non-scented, clumping clay litter. Spread litter boxes out so there is one in every part of the home. Neutering is the most effective treatment for urine marking – over 90% of male cats will stop problematic urine marking when neutered.

If your cat is producing more urine than usual, if urine has a pink or red colour, or if they seem to be stressed or in pain when urinating, there could be something medical going on. Contact your veterinarian.

Humping

One embarrassing (but natural) behavior that intact male cats sometimes engage in is humping. They may hump other animals, people, or even objects such as furniture. If this occurs, try to engage your cat in another activity, such as a chase game, food puzzle, or some rewards-based training. Neutering will resolve this behaviour.

Roaming/Interest in Intact Females

Intact male cats are hormonally motivated to roam, especially if there is an intact female anywhere within sniffing distance (farther than you might think). We recommend strictly no outdoor access for intact male cats, unless they can be contained in a secure outdoor enclosure such as a catio, or are harnessed and leashed.

For more information, please visit: <https://spca.bc.ca/faqs/%E2%80%8Bhow-will-spaying-or-neutering-help-my-pet/>