



Neutering Your Guinea Pig

Neutering is the surgical removal of parts of the reproductive system, rendering an animal sterile and unable to produce offspring. Neutering or 'spaying' a female involves removing the womb and ovaries (an ovariectomy). Neutering or 'castrating' the male involves the removal of the testicles. The vet usually makes a small incision on each scrotum and surgically removes the testicles from within.

Just a note on the word: Some of us think we 'neuter' males and 'spay' females, but the word 'neuter' is actually gender neutral and applies to both sexes. Other terms used interchangeably with neutering are 'altering' or 'fixing.' However, for the most part, we will also use the term *neuter* rather than *castration* to refer to neutering males.

The only valid, non-medical reason to neuter your male guinea pig is because you have a female you want him to room with. Neutering does little to change the behavior of aggressive guinea pigs, unlike the effect it has on other types of animals. Likewise, neutering does little to curb mounting or sexual behavior. It **will** prevent unwanted pregnancies. There is no need or reason to neuter two boars living together. If they don't get along now, neutering won't help. Please see the [social life](#) page for more discussion on issues related to pairing up guinea pigs. Please see the [breeding](#) page for more information on the dangers and concerns of breeding.

Are risks involved in neutering? Yes. The risks are detailed below. However, they can be minimized. Are there risks in keeping two opposite-sex fertile animals in the same house? Yes. Even with the best of intentions and diligent practices, accidents can happen. Accidental pregnancies can result in the death of a sow or serious health problems requiring major veterinary care. Can those risks be minimized? Yes. Can either risk be completely eliminated? No.

Please be aware that as with any surgery, even with a healthy animal, the best vet, and proper after-surgery care, there is a chance that your guinea pig may not make it. Only you can weigh your options and determine the best course for you and your animals.

Risks of Neutering

Performing a surgical procedure on any animal involves the risk of death from complications--either on the operating table, post-operatively, or later during recovery at home, sometimes due to infections.

Neutering a guinea pig inherently carries more risks than neutering cats, dogs or other larger animals. The guinea pig is smaller, the operation is complicated by the nature of the scrotal area and open inguinal canal. They are harder to surgically prepare. They are more susceptible to anesthesia reactions, stress, and post-op infections.

If you are prepared to accept these risks to your guinea pig and take responsibility for the consequences, you should realize it is your duty to minimize those risks as much as possible.

Neuter vs Spay

Spaying a female is generally considered a riskier surgical procedure than neutering a male. It is more invasive. An incision is made through the abdomen, and internal reproductive organs are

removed.

It can be difficult enough to find a vet who is experienced and has a good success rate with cavy neuters. It can be even more difficult to find one who has done a number of successful spays. The same precautions apply.

Removing the female sex organs means your cavy cannot get ovarian cysts or tumors, a *potential* health benefit. However, all considerations and risks must be weighed before deciding upon any elective surgery.

Pre-Surgery Preparation for Castration

Healthy!

Your guinea pig should have already been seen by the vet prior to his castration appointment. Some vets will do a blood test to check for hidden health problems. If you suspect any health problems, wait until your guinea pig is completely healthy. See your vet to resolve any health issues.

Proper weight and age

The age at which a vet is willing to castrate a cavy varies. Some have a two month minimum, others 3 or 4. Four months old is preferable. He should also be a good weight. 650 grams is the minimum, heavier is better. We have had guinea pigs neutered who are 3 to 4 years old as well. While there isn't an age limit on a healthy adult guinea pig, seniors should not be subjected to the additional stress of undergoing unnecessary surgery.

Fasting prior to surgery is NOT necessary.

At most, removing food one or two hours prior to surgery is all that is necessary. Food should be available for the post-surgery recovery period.

Fasting animals too long can cause hypoglycemia and gastrointestinal changes resulting in an inability to properly use the nutrition they get post-operatively. Cavies do not vomit and that is another reason fasting is not necessary. Vomiting post-operatively is a main reason we fast cats, dogs, and even humans. It is a cause of aspiration pneumonia and/or choking, but not an issue with guinea pigs.

Post-Surgical Care

Antibiotics and Pain Medication

Ask for antibiotics for 5 days (Baytril) and possibly pain medication for 3 days. Pain meds are optional and usually not needed. However, a reason to use pain meds is to encourage eating after the surgery. When an animal is in pain, they have a tendency not to eat. There are two types of pain meds--NSAIDs and narcotics. NSAIDs (Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs) are similar to aspirin. For guinea pigs, these include **carprofen** (or **Rimadyl**, a brand name of the drug carprofen) and **Meloxicam**. Some vets prescribe narcotic pain relievers such as Torbutrol or Torbugesic (brand names of butorphanols) and Buprenex (brand name of buprenorphine). These are usually prescribed after more invasive and painful surgeries and generally not needed after a castration.

Towels for bedding

Keep him on clean terrycloth towels for at least 3 days, longer depending on how the suture site looks. Change the bedding frequently--at least twice a day. If your guinea pig chews on the towels, use flat newspaper instead (not shredded). White towels are best; you can monitor any bleeding and poop and pee output more easily.

Reduce strenuous activity

Isolate the guinea pig from any other cage companions. Also, if your cage has any ramps or upper-deck access or anything to climb over, remove any such items or access until your guinea pig has completely recovered -- one to two weeks.

Check incision site regularly

You must look at the incision site at least once a day for the first few days. If the vet used surgical glue, look to make sure the incision site remains closed. If the vet used stitches or staples, make sure they are in place and look normal. Watch for swelling. Any pus indicates an infection. If you have to take the guinea pig back to the vet to have stitches or staples removed, continue the post-op care and monitoring until you are certain there is no possible infection at the suture site.

Extra Vitamin C

In addition to adequate food and water, increase the daily vitamin C supplement to 50-75 mg, depending on the weight of the guinea pig.

Monitor weight

Weigh him daily and make sure he is eating. Your guinea pig should be eating within a hour or two after surgery.

Monitor behavior

Watch his behavior and contact the vet if there are any problems. Problematic behavior would include lethargy and not eating.

Waiting Period

Make sure you wait **three to four weeks** after surgery before placing your neutered male with a female. The male needs time for any live sperm to die or work its way out of his system.

Residual Benefits of Neutering Males

The only reason to neuter your boar is to render him sterile so that he can be with females without risk of pregnancy. However, there are some potential side benefits with neutered male guinea pigs.

- As male guinea pigs age, **some** boars will develop an impaction problem when they get older. Neutering tends to decrease the chance of impaction later in life. It seems that the sometimes large testicles can contribute to the impaction of the rectal pouch area.
- **Some** males have an active scent gland (just about the tail area) with a noticeable waxy or greasy buildup. Neutering seems to reduce the waxy scent gland buildup.
- While sexual and aggressive behavior does not change much with a male once neutered, for **some** guinea pigs, over a longer period of time, their sexual aggression is reduced.