

Fostering or Adopting an Intact Male Cat

The ASPCA normally requires that all cats and dogs receive routine 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 some 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, 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

On average cats reach sexual maturity between 5-9 months of age, which is when you may start to notice hormonally-driven behavior problems. This is also when you need to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies. However, continued socialization with other cats is critical for proper development of social behavior so if you intend for your cat to live with other cats, it's important that you continue to socialize him, preferably with spayed females and neutered males, to minimize potential problems.

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 enclosed terrace or porch. Intact male cats with outdoor access are at high risk of causing unwanted pregnancies, fighting with other cats, and becoming lost due to roaming behavior.

Urine Marking

Intact cats are at increased risk for urine marking, commonly called spraying. Spraying is the way cats, especially intact males, mark their territory. You can minimize the likelihood of your cat spraying by making sure that he doesn't see other cats outside or smell other cats' odor on shoes when people come inside.

In male cats, spraying usually looks like this: the cat approaches a vertical surface, sniffs it, turns around, points his hind end towards the surface, and sprays a small amount of urine in a strong stream aimed toward the vertical surface. The tail is raised and quivering, and the cat may tread lightly with his front feet. The urine tends to have a more pungent smell than urine voided into a litter box. Less commonly, male cats may mark with small amounts of urine on horizontal surfaces.

Be observant and watch for behavior that precedes marking, such as prolonged sniffing of a vertical surface, an area by a window or door, or an object that has been outside. Redirect the cat from sniffing and remove the object or place something to obstruct the area. If the cat begins to raise his tail and quiver, immediately interrupt the behavior by making a sound (e.g. clapping your hands) or tossing something that startles him (e.g. car keys), and then distract him with another activity.

Urine marked areas should be cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner (multiple brands, available for purchase online or in pet supply stores) per package instructions. However, bear in mind that cleaning an area really well may actually encourage the cat to spray there again. Best to wait until you're certain that you've minimized the likelihood of the cat spraying in the area again before cleaning it thoroughly.

The most effective way to manage urine marking in male cats is to restrict them to a specific area, such as a large cattery or room in your house, and provide a "kitty urinal." Up-end a litter box against a vertical surface and place a bit of litter on the bottom to hold the box in place and absorb the spray. Rub a bit of urine from the cat's litterbox or from an area where the cat sprayed previously to encourage the cat to spray in the urinal.

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

For more detailed information on curbing urine marking in male cats, [visit ASPCA.org](https://www.aspcapro.org)

Humping

One embarrassing, but natural, behavior that some intact male cats engage in is mounting and humping. They may hump people or other animals, but most often they will hump objects such as pillows and toys. While there are several reasons why a cat might hump, including play, if this is an intact male cat, most likely it is a form of masturbation. If this occurs and you find it annoying, try to engage your cat in another activity, such as a game with a favorite toy, a few treats tossed on the floor, or some reward-based training. Otherwise, the behavior is not harmful and presumably enjoyable for the cat.

Contact Between Intact Males and Females

It can be challenging to keep intact males and females together in the same home because of the risk of an unwanted pregnancy. Female cats are polyestrous, meaning that they tend to come into heat several times a year. The 'in heat' period can last a variable amount of time, from 4-20 days, and if the cat is not impregnated, she will continue to come into heat every 2-3 weeks. When female cats come into heat, intact males can become very forceful in their attempts to reach and mate females. Furthermore, heat cycles are not always obvious, and female cats can be fertile before signs of heat are noticeable to owners. A successful breeding can happen very quickly so it's best to make sure that there is complete separation of intact male and female cats within the same household.

For more information, please visit <https://www.aspcapro.org/covid19sn>