



## DESEXING YOUR PET

Exotic animals have traditionally had a poor reputation for anaesthetic survival, and this mind set has persisted into modern veterinary medicine. Whilst some statistics suggest that surgery and anesthesia is risky in exotics, this article will review surgeries that are performed everyday at The Unusual Pet Vets. We see many exotics for routine sterilization. This includes rabbits, ferrets, guinea pigs and even the smaller mammals, like rats and mice. The recommendation behind desexing in these species is often 'population control' or to prevent unwanted pregnancies. However, there are also some very well studied medical benefits to desexing exotic pets.

### Rabbits

Desexing is recommended in both male and female rabbits. Female rabbits have a high incidence of uterine cancer, with rabbits over 3 years of age having a 50-80% chance of developing these tumours, depending on their breed. Both males and females can also develop unwanted behaviours such as urine spraying and aggression, if not desexed at an early age.

### Ferrets

Desexing is recommended in both male and female ferrets, but there are also very good alternatives to *surgical* desexing in ferrets. Sterilisation in both males and females can reduce the strong musk-like odour of many ferrets, as well as preventing life-threatening conditions in female ferrets. Up to 50% of female ferrets are unable to come out of heat without being mated, and this can lead to toxic levels of oestrogen build up in their system. In some cases, this can cause fatal anaemia to develop.

The Unusual Pet Vets also stocks Suprelorin implants, which is a form of non-surgical sterilization that can last up to 2 years in ferrets. These implants also avoid the risk of developing certain forms of adrenal gland disease that have been associated with early desexing in ferrets.

### Guinea Pigs

Desexing is recommended in both male and female guinea pigs. Female guinea pigs have a high incidence of ovarian cysts, which can produce hormones such as oestrogen that lead to fur loss, anaemia and weight loss. In male guinea pigs, castration is generally recommended for two main reasons; the first is behaviour and the second is faecal impaction and constipation. Entire male guinea pigs (boars) are prone to fighting and will regularly bite and scratch other guinea pigs they are kept with. Older boars also often develop large testicles, and these can partially obstruct their anus in later years. Some older guinea pigs will require daily cleaning of their anus if they aren't sterilised at a young age.

### Rats

Male and female rats can both benefit from desexing. Females have a high incidence of mammary tumours and by removing the uterus and ovaries, we remove the hormones that can promote mammary tumours to develop. In males, the main advantage is preventing fighting between adult males and also unwanted pregnancies.

### Mice

Desexing is recommended for male mice, but not routinely for females. Castration of male mice can prevent fighting between mice, which is unfortunately common. However, due to the small size of mice, desexing female mice is not routinely performed unless your mouse has a diagnosed problem with their reproductive organs.

