

You and other vets talk about how important it is to have pets neutered. When I looked into having my dog spayed, the cost was going to be \$700 between the charges for pre-operative lab tests, surgery and pain medication. What am I supposed to do if I can't afford this?

First I would like to commend you for considering having the surgery done. Besides preventing hormone related diseases later in life, we all know there are far more puppies born every year than there are good homes to place them in.

I don't know where you live, but within a given area, neutering fees among veterinary hospitals are relatively comparable. Your quote of \$700 does sound high for our area of Maryland, but might be a fair price for a higher cost of living area such as New York City. The fees a hospital charges are related to their overhead costs of running the practice, maintaining the building and equipment, salaries of the doctor and veterinary assistants involved in the surgery and aftercare of the patient, and drugs and medical supplies used in the procedure. Most hospitals price their elective neutering procedures to be affordable to the majority of their clientele even if it is below their actual cost.

You may find a lower surgery fee by calling other clinics near you. If it is fair to assume the expertise of the surgeon is comparable and the quality of equipment and supplies is comparable, but the cost is significantly lower than your original estimate of \$700, make sure that they are including everything the higher priced hospital includes. This could be intravenous catheter and fluids during the surgery, monitoring during anesthesia (blood pressure, oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate, etc.), hot air blankets to maintain safe body temperature during surgery, injections of pain medication, monitoring during the recovery period, etc.

You may also find veterinarians who have an interest-free payment plan such as Care Credit which can allow you to divide the cost of the procedure into more manageable monthly payments. If none of these options are viable for you, check your local animal control facility and animal shelters to see if they offer low cost spays and neuters. Their fees will be lower as they are tax exempt organizations, and are subsidized with government or charitable funding. Just make sure you know how their procedures compare to those of private veterinary hospitals.

When planning to adopt or purchase a pet that has not already been neutered, plan on this one-time expense when you are figuring out if you can afford a new pet. The first year's veterinary care will often be more involved and costly than the next few years for a young pet.

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