



# The REAL costs of desexing explained (in detail!)

## Desexing - why do we do it?

Desexing your pet is a huge part of being a responsible pet owner. Shelters are full, and apart from adding to the overpopulation of unwanted puppies and kittens, there are no health benefits to allowing your pet to have a litter.

In female dogs and cats who are not desexed, that is, those who remain 'entire', the risks of developing potentially fatal mammary (breast) cancers and uterus infections (pyometra) are extremely high. This risk increases with each heat or 'season' they have. Other cancers of the reproductive system are also common, and of course cannot occur if these organs are no longer present.

Entire male dogs are at greater risk of testicular and prostate cancers, aggressive and antisocial behaviour towards humans and other animals, and are far more likely to roam or escape. Entire male cats have extremely smelly urine and are more likely to roam and fight.

## What equipment and facilities are involved in running a clinic?

Just like a hospital for humans, a veterinary clinic must be carefully designed and built, and the practice must own and maintain a large variety of specialised equipment. When performing general surgery, a full surgical kit including over 20 different instruments, surgical swabs, scalpel blades, and suture material is used for each procedure. Sterile gloves, surgical drapes, masks and caps are also used for each surgery. Some of these items are single use, and others, such as stainless steel instruments, must be thoroughly cleaned and dried, packed into a kit, and sterilised in an autoclave machine prior to their next use.

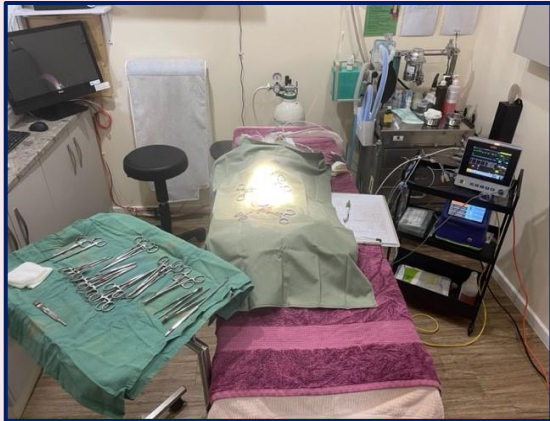


Sterile surgical drape, gloves,  
suture materials & scalpel blade



Sterile surgical kit ready for use

Surgical theatres must be dedicated rooms. At The Vet Clinic, our theatre houses anaesthetic machines and breathing circuits, oxygen supplies, a carbon dioxide scavenging unit, intravenous fluid pumps and fluid bags, a dental machine with drill, a gas lift surgical table, surgical lights, extraction fans, patient warming and positioning devices, a suction unit, a cautery unit, an ultrasound machine, surgical trolleys, a multiparameter surgical monitor with ECG, blood pressure and more, multiple surgical kits and instrumentation, and a large supply of different sizes and strengths of suture materials.



**Patient in theatre ready to undergo a surgical procedure**



**Multiparameter vital signs monitor, patient warmer, and anaesthetic machine**

In addition, most clinics have a variety of in-house blood testing machines, several microscopes, pathology items including microscope slides, blood tubes, specimen jars, swabs, etc. Clinics must also pay initially and annually for the software used to run these machines. One or more X-ray units, developers, and software programs are also needed. At The Vet Clinic, we have the ability to perform soft tissue, orthopaedic and dental x-rays, all of which requires specialised equipment which must be inspected, serviced, and licenced annually. Depending on each individual pet's requirements, these lab and x-ray machines may be needed in conjunction with a desexing procedure.



**Laboratory equipment and blood machines**



Pharmacy



Additional pharmacy stock



On top of all this, even the most straightforward surgical procedure requires the use of at least 5 to 6 different medications; this includes desexing surgeries. Vet clinics must stock all of these drugs and many more, as well as having a large supply of needles, syringes, dispensing bottles, prescription labels etc. Often, we must keep medications that are rarely used, sometimes resulting in eventual disposal due to expiry which is an additional cost to the clinic. Vets and nurses must also have a thorough and intimate knowledge of over 100 medications, their uses, side effects, and their effect on patients.



Wide range of suture materials

The costs of owning the clinic building, installing and maintaining cages, laundering of bedding, utility bills, rates, insurance, annual practice fees, individual vet's annual professional registration and other overheads also add up very quickly.

**Desexing is a surgical procedure.  
Just like human medical staff, vets and nurses are  
highly trained individuals with specialised skills  
and knowledge.**

## Vet clinics bear most of the costs of desexing your pet

Desexing procedures are priced to result in a much lower profit margin than any other surgery, and many clinics make no profit at all on these procedures. Clinics wear these costs as a service to their communities in order to allow more people access to responsible pet care. We also heavily discount these procedures for animal welfare reasons, both for the pets themselves and for wildlife. Higher pet populations lead to more strays, resulting in larger numbers of cats and dogs (especially feral and unowned animals) who then pose a risk both to human health and the health and survival of wildlife populations.

**Veterinary clinics are private businesses, and DO NOT receive any subsidy from the government!**

## How much will it cost me to desex my pet?

Across the profession, prices will vary for each procedure. Differences in prices may be due to location, quality of consumable products used, brand of medications, type of equipment used, number of staff involved in the procedure, individual business owner decisions, and other factors. Generally though, the price of desexing dogs and cats in South Australia falls in a similar range.

As an example, the below represent price ranges for desexing pets in SA.

- Male cats \$100 to \$250
- Female cats \$250 to \$450
- Male dogs less than 10kg \$250 to \$450
- Female dogs less than 10kg \$300 to \$600
- Male dogs 10-25kg \$350 to \$550
- Female dogs 10-25kg \$350 to \$650
- Male dogs 25-40kg \$400 to \$600
- Female dogs 25-40kg \$500 to \$900

## How much does it cost to run a veterinary clinic?

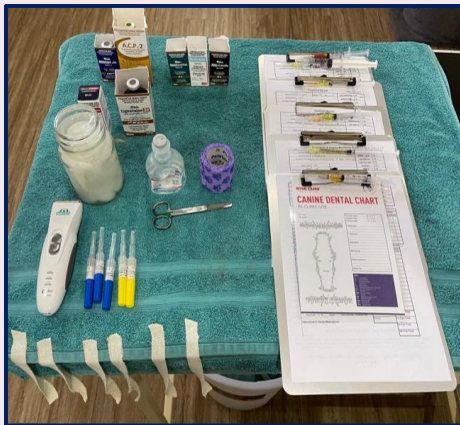
Of course, costs will vary depending on the number of staff, size of clinic, equipment owned, location etc. For a small animal clinic with around 10 staff, approximate annual costs are as follows:

Practice and individual vet registration	\$6,000
Staff training and continuing education	\$30,000
Equipment lease/loans and running costs	\$11,000
Equipment licencing/certification	\$1,000
Utilities, rates	\$10,000
Building and/or vehicle costs	\$30,000
Worker's compensation	\$60,000
Wages and superannuation	\$700,000
Insurance	\$7,000
Software and IT	\$3,000
Oxygen	\$5,000
Professional fees	\$10,000
Laboratory, AWL fees	\$25,000
Stock on shelf (medications, pet food)	\$300,000
Pro bono (wildlife and welfare cases)	\$10,000
Other	\$8,000
<b>TOTAL annual clinic running costs</b>	<b>\$1,216,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DAILY clinic running costs</b>	<b>\$3,500</b>

## How much does it cost the clinic to desex my pet?

Taking into account the figures listed above, and breaking it down even further, below are the average general costs to a clinic of performing a desexing procedure for a 20kg female dog:

Medications & anaesthetics	\$50.00
Consumables (syringes, needles, swabs, gloves, caps, masks etc)	\$40.00
Suture materials, scalpel blades	\$50.00
Elizabethan collar	\$17.00
Staff time & professional fees (1-2 nurses, 1 vet)	\$200.00
General overheads inc equipment costs	\$40.00
<b>TOTAL COST TO CLINIC</b>	<b>\$397.00</b>



**Charts, pre-medications & IV catheters prepared ready for the day**

## Why do some clinics charge more than others?

As private businesses, veterinary clinics are able to price their products and services at any level they are comfortable with. Of course, there are many expenses involved in the general running of a clinic, and the prices set by the clinic will need to take into account these costs as well as the desired profit margin, supply and demand economics, consumer pressure, and industry averages.

In general, the price of a particular surgical procedure is roughly within the 'same ballpark' regardless of the clinic, however the actual cost may vary depending on the brands and types of medications and consumables used, the number of staff involved (some clinics do not have nurses involved in procedures), use of monitoring equipment, overhead costs, wage rates etc.

Veterinary services can be thought of as belonging on a continuum from 'first aid' through to 'gold standard', that is, from the bare minimum required to relieve suffering, to performing ALL the tests and treatments recommended by text books and current research. Clearly, in order to be able to offer and practice at a 'gold standard' level, prices must be higher to cover the increased costs associated with this level of service.

**There is no Medicare for pets!**

Of course, as with any product or service, pet owners differ hugely in the amount they can or want to pay for veterinary services, and there will always be a place for the wide range of veterinary practices and price points that exist in the market.

## Is there anything wrong with going to a 'low-cost' clinic?

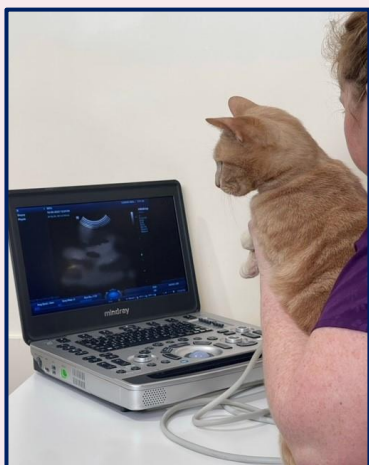
Like anything, you get what you pay for! Having said that, there are pros and cons to attending so called 'low-cost' clinics.

Pros:

- Lower costs mean lower prices, which allows more people to access veterinary care for their pets
- This results in improved animal welfare overall, and improved human mental health and well-being
- Not every pet owner has the means or desire to pay the prices required for clinics to offer 'gold standard level' procedures

Cons:

- Lower prices result in lower profit margins for business owners. This means there is less money to put back into the business for better wages, more staff, equipment upgrades etc
- Medications may be generically branded and fewer may be used; monitoring may be minimal or may not occur at all. Patient warming, intraoperative IV fluids and IV catheters may not be used. Equipment is likely to be older, less reliable, or not used at all. Sterility may not be as meticulous. Pre and post operative pain relief medications may not be given, or less expensive options chosen. Suture material may be of lesser quality.



**Our second-hand ultrasound machine  
cost \$30,000!**

### Not all procedures are created equal!

The same surgery at two clinics may be performed very differently, resulting in different costs to the clinic and hence different prices for the pet owner. Sometimes these price differences are huge, and even though it is the 'same surgery', it can be like comparing apples to oranges. Or public healthcare with private healthcare. Or economy class to business class. The client pays more because it costs more, and it costs more because it is closer to the 'gold standard' end of the curve.

## How can I find out more?

At The Vet Clinic we believe strongly in education and transparency, and all our staff are happy to answer any questions you may have regarding pricing, costs, behind-the-scenes activities, or any other query. Simply give us a call, drop into the clinic, find us on Facebook, or send us an email!