

Should I have my dog castrated / spayed?

Neutering your pet is important for a number of very good reasons. It will prevent unwanted litters of puppies, as well as reducing the incidence of antisocial behaviour and quite a number of common diseases and infections. This fact sheet aims to outline some of the reasons why we neuter dogs. Please feel free to discuss your options with the vet or nurse if you are unsure whether to have your pet neutered

Should I have my dog castrated?

Dogs may be castrated from 6 months of age onwards.

Advantages

- **Pregnancy:** - Castration prevents unwanted matings.
- **Behaviour:** - Castration can reduce behavioural problems such as aggression, urine marking, libido and straying from home. The earlier he is neutered the more likely this is to succeed. Can stop embarrassing behaviour in male dogs!
- **Cancer:** - Castration removes the risk of testicular tumours and anal adenomas.
- **Prostate:** - Castration will reduce the risk of prostate problems in later life.
- Although neutering helps reduce behaviour problems, it will not adversely affect the basic character of your pet!

Disadvantages

- **Weight gain:** - Castrated dogs can sometimes put on weight after the operation, the reason is that the operation slows the animal's metabolic rate. If you feed the animal at the same rate as before then the surplus energy will be converted to fat. The solution is to keep a careful check of the animal's weight and reduce its diet accordingly.
- **Surgical risk:** - Like all operations be aware that there is a very small element of risk. Thankfully we find that complications are very rare.

Monorchids/Cryptorchids. In some dogs one or both testicles fails to descend properly into the scrotum at birth. This is thought to be largely a hereditary condition, and therefore affected animals should not be bred from (and cannot be shown). Retained testicles have a high risk of becoming cancerous and we therefore recommend that all monorchid and cryptorchid animals should be castrated.

Should I have my bitch spayed?

Bitches usually come into season from 6-9 months of age (or later in some of the larger breeds) and the season lasts about 2-3 weeks. The first sign is a swelling of the vulva. This is followed by a bloody discharge - though all you may notice is the bitch licking herself excessively. This stage lasts 8-13 days on average (extremely variable) and the bitch will become attractive to male dogs. After this the discharge becomes clearer, the bitch will stand to be mated and she is truly in season. Again this stage is very variable (4-7 days but can be much longer). Some bitches can be mated and conceive whilst they are bleeding. Most bitches come into season every 6 months or so.

Bitches should ideally not be spayed whilst they are in season or during a false pregnancy, therefore the best time for spaying is 2-4 months after a season (although if this is a problem please talk to a vet). If you do not intend to breed from your bitch we recommend having her spayed before her first season i.e. at about 6 months of age in most breeds.

Advantages

The Obvious: - There are a number of advantages to having your bitch spayed which will be obvious to any dog owner such as the avoidance of the danger of unwanted puppies, the mess and inconvenience of the bitch coming into season, and there may be male dogs hanging about making a nuisance of themselves.

False Pregnancy: - This is a normal part of the female dog's reproductive cycle and it occurs a few weeks after the end of the bitch coming into season. Not all bitches show the same symptoms and some are worse than others but an affected bitch may be depressed, not want to eat, may show anxiety, or strange behaviour such as bed making or carrying objects such as toys about as if they were puppies. Spayed bitches do not get false pregnancy.

Breast Cancer: - Data has shown that the incidence of mammary tumours in unneutered bitches is significantly higher than in those spayed at an early age. If your dog is spayed before she has her first season (i.e. between 6 months and 1 year of age) she will almost certainly never develop mammary cancer. Many canine mammary cancers are malignant and often will have already spread by the time they are detected. The surgery involved can be extensive, and unfortunately is common in unspayed bitches.

Pyometra (Womb infection): - A significant proportion of unspayed bitches develop a condition called pyometra in later life. This is where the womb becomes infected and full of pus. This infection is very serious

can be fatal if not surgically corrected. Of course if the animal has been spayed and does not have a womb then it cannot contract this disease

Disadvantages

Weight gain: - Spayed bitches can sometimes put on weight after the operation, the reason is that the spay operation alters the animal's metabolic rate, that is the body's internal clock, making it tick slower as it were. If you feed the animal at the same rate as before then the surplus energy will be converted to fat. The remedy of course is to keep a careful check of the animals weight and reduce its diet accordingly.

Urinary incontinence: - A very small percentage of spayed bitches may become incontinent in later life, when this happens there are some very good drugs to control the situation. This is more common in certain breeds, so please discuss with the vet.

Surgical risk: - The operation your pet has is an ovario-hysterectomy, ie removal of the womb and ovaries. This is a fairly major operation and like all operations be aware that there is a very small element of risk. Thankfully we find that complications are very rare.

Neutering of any animal may slightly reduce its metabolic rate and therefore reduce its food requirement to maintain a normal body weight. Careful attention to diet will prevent excessive weight gain and is important to your pet's health. We are happy to advise on the optimum diet for your pet. Please feel free to ask a vet or veterinary nurse about your pet's diet. We also hold free "Nurse Clinics" on most afternoons where your pet's weight can be monitored and diets can be discussed with our nurses who are qualified nutritional advisors.

What is involved?

When you book your pet in for his/her operation with the receptionist, you will usually be asked to come in for a **pre-op check**, so that a vet can examine your pet and find out if he/she is ready to be castrated / spayed. Once the vet is happy that your pet is healthy, you can book in for the operation. You will be asked **not to feed** him/her after 9pm the night before the operation, and to remove the water bowl first thing in the morning. This is important as a full stomach increases the risk of your pet being sick when coming round from the anaesthetic, which can be dangerous. You will be asked to bring your pet to the surgery between **8 and 8.30am** (between 8.30 and 9am at Feltham and Addlestone surgeries) on the morning of the operation. You will be asked to read and **sign a consent form**. Please read this carefully and ask about anything you are not sure about.

In order to minimise the risks and complications of a general anaesthetic, we perform a full physical examination of your pet. However we highly recommend a **pre anaesthetic blood test**, at an additional fee, to identify any pre-existing problems that may not be evident physically but may potentially lead to complications. Although all pets could benefit from this test, we would especially recommend it for those pets over 8 years of age, or who seem to have an increased thirst. The test checks for kidney function, liver damage and glucose levels and so helps us to ensure that your pet's organs are healthy and there are no hidden problems that could put your pet at risk. If the results are within the normal range we can proceed with confidence, knowing the anaesthetic risk is minimised. If results are not within the normal ranges, we can alter the anaesthetic procedure, reduce drug dosages, use intravenous fluids and take other precautions to safeguard your pet's health and reduce the risk of complications. We will contact you if the pre operative blood results are abnormal.

A veterinary nurse will admit your pet provided that a pre op check has taken place. If your pet has shown any signs of being unwell in the recent past or has any allergies to medication, then please bring this to his/her attention. A nurse will then take your pet through to the hospital area where he/she will be weighed and given a pre-med injection. This reduces any anxiety and allows a smoother transition into and out of anaesthesia, as well as providing postoperative pain relief. Your pet is then bedded down in our kennels until he/she is ready for the operation. A short acting anaesthetic is administered by injection into a vein in the leg, which causes the animal to fall asleep within a few seconds. A tube is then placed into the animal's airway and connected to an anaesthetic machine that keeps him/her asleep on a gaseous anaesthetic for the duration of the operation. A nurse monitors the anaesthetic throughout the operation, and once the operation is over your pet is kept on oxygen until he/she starts to wake up, which takes only a few minutes. Your pet will be given a pain relieving injection and returned to kennels where he/she is given a comfy bed and monitored until fully conscious.

Patients in for routine operations are usually allowed home the same day, but occasionally they will need to stay overnight if they are still sleepy from the anaesthetic. Your pet may be sent home with an Elizabethan collar to prevent them from interfering with the wound. We ask owners to bring their pets in for a post op check with the nurse 2-3 days following surgery, and a second check up at 10-14 days to check the wound and remove any non-dissolvable stitches. There are no extra charges for these check-ups (excluding medication).