

Canine Spay FAQ

THE PET HEALTH LIBRARY

By Wendy C. Brooks, DVM, DipABVP

Educational Director, VeterinaryPartner.com

Surgical sterilization of the female dog, commonly referred to as spaying, is one of the most significant aspects of female dog care an owner can provide. The benefits to the dog FAR outweigh simply not having puppies, though as pet over-populations looms as a societal problem it is important to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Spaying involves removal of the uterus and ovaries. It is a major surgery but a commonly performed one, ideally performed while a female dog is still in puppyhood, prior to her first heat cycle.

WHY FEMALE DOGS SHOULD BE SPAYED

Mammary Cancer Prevention

A female dog spayed before her first heat will have a near zero chance of developing mammary cancer.

After the first heat, this incidence climbs to 7% and after the second heat the risk is 25% (one in four!). It is easy to see that an early spay can completely prevent what is frequently a very difficult and potentially fatal form of cancer.

But is it too late if a dog is already past her second heat? No, in fact spaying is important even in female dogs who already have obvious tumors. This is because many mammary tumors are stimulated by estrogens; removing the ovaries, the source of estrogens, will help retard tumor spread.

Pyometra Prevention

Pyometra is the life-threatening infection of the uterus that generally occurs in middle-aged to older female dogs in the six weeks following heat. The hormone progesterone, which primes the uterus for potential pregnancy, does so by causing proliferation of the blood-filled uterine lining and suppressing uterine immune function. It is thus easy during heat for bacteria in the vagina to ascend to the uterus and cause infection. The uterus with pyometra swells dramatically and is filled with pus, bacteria, dying tissue, and toxins. Without treatment, the dog is expected to die. Despite her serious medical state, she must be spayed quickly if her life is to be saved.

- This is an extremely common disease of unspayed female dogs.
- Without treatment the dog will die.
- Treatment is expensive.
- Treatment involves surgery in a potentially unstable patient.
- Spaying prevents the whole thing.

The older unspayed female dog has an irregular heat cycle. There is no end of cycling comparable to human menopause. If you still decide against spaying, be familiar with the signs of pyometra [LINK](#), which include loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting, excessive thirst, marked vaginal discharge.

Simple Convenience

The female dog comes into heat every 8 months or so. There is a bloody vaginal discharge and local male dogs are attracted. Often there is an offensive odor.

Canine Neuter FAQ

THE PET HEALTH LIBRARY

By Wendy C. Brooks, DVM, DipABVP

Educational Director, VeterinaryPartner.com

What are the Health Benefits to the Dog?

There are several health benefits to neutering. One of the most important concerns the prostate gland, which under the influence of testosterone will gradually enlarge over the course of the dog's life. In age, it is likely to become uncomfortable, possibly being large enough to interfere with defecation. The prostate under the influence of testosterone is also predisposed to infection, which is almost impossible to clear up without neutering. Neutering causes the prostate to shrink into insignificance, thus preventing both prostatitis as well as the uncomfortable benign hyperplasia (enlargement) that occurs with aging. It is often erroneously held that neutering prevents prostate cancer but this is not true.

Other health benefits of neutering include the prevention of certain types of hernias and tumors of the testicles and anus. Excessive preputial discharge is also reduced by neutering.

What Behavioral Changes can be Expected after Neutering?

The only behavior changes that are observed after neutering relate to behaviors influenced by male hormones. Playfulness, friendliness, and socialization with humans are not changed. The behaviors that change are far less desirable. The interest in roaming is eliminated in 90% of neutered dogs. Aggressive behavior against other male dogs is eliminated in 60% of neutered dogs. Urine marking is eliminated in 50% of neutered male dogs. Inappropriate mounting is eliminated in 70% of neutered dogs.

At what Age can Neutering be Performed?

Neutering can be performed at any age over age 8 weeks provided both testicles have descended. Dogs neutered before puberty (generally age 6 months) tend to grow a bit bigger than dogs neutered after puberty (testosterone is involved in causing bones to stop growing, so without testosterone the bones stop growing later). The same behavior and prostate health benefits can be realized no matter what age the dog is. (In other words, a dog does not become "too old" to obtain the same health and behavioral benefits of neutering.)

The traditional age for neutering is around 6 months of age and many veterinarians still recommend neutering at this age.

Will he Become Over-Weight or Lethargic?

Activity level and appetite do not change with neutering. A male dog should not gain weight or become less interested in activity post neuter.

Will he still be Interested in Females?

His interest will be reduced but if he is around a female dog in heat, he will become aroused by her. Mounting behavior often has roots in the expression of dominance and may be expressed by a neutered male in a variety of circumstances that are not motivated by sexuality.