



ENNIS VETERINARY SURGERY

Information for Owners on Spaying and Neutering (Castrating) Dogs

What is neutering?

Both male and female dogs can be neutered to prevent them producing puppies. These are surgical procedures that are performed under general anaesthesia.

When we neuter (castrate) a male dog we remove both testicles through a small wound between the dog's prepuce and the scrotum, leaving the scrotal sac in place.

'Spaying' is a term used to describe the neutering of a female dog. During this surgical procedure we remove her ovaries and uterus (ovario-hysterectomy) through an incision in the middle of her lower abdomen.

When is the best age to neuter a dog?

It is best to consult one of our vets with regard to the best time to neuter your individual dog. Below are some guidelines that may be of help when considering your decision.

- It is recommended that male and female **small dogs** (e.g., Terriers, small spaniels, Poodles etc.) are neutered/spayed at **5-6 months of age** (before a female's dog first season/heat).
- In the case of **large breeds** (e.g., Springer spaniels, Weimeraners, Labrador retrievers, etc.) and **giant breeds** (e.g., Bernese Mountain dog, Great Dane) there may be benefits in delaying neutering until the dog is more skeletally mature (between 9 and 12 months). However, because the risk of mammary tumours increases in females spayed after their first heat we advise owners of these breeds to consult with us so the pros and cons of delaying neutering can be fully explained.
- It is not recommended to spay a bitch while she is in season. Ideally, a bitch should be neutered 10-12 weeks after the end of her last season (to reduce the risk of post-spaying false pregnancy).
- It is not recommended that a bitch is spayed while she is lactating (producing milk for puppies). If a bitch has had a litter of puppies it is generally safe to neuter her 10 weeks post whelping (i.e. when the pups are 10 weeks of age and fully weaned).

Why should I neuter my dog?

Bitches reach puberty between 5 and 12 months of age (depending on the breed and individual). She will then come into season (also known as heat) approximately every 6 months. During her heat, which usually lasts around 3 weeks, she will have a bloody vaginal discharge (can be a nuisance in a house dog) and she will attract male dogs and may stray in search of a mate. If your bitch does become pregnant complications can occur during the birth which may be far more expensive than the cost of having her neutered! Rearing puppies properly is expensive and time consuming and it is not always easy to find good homes for the pups.

Thousands of dogs are euthanized in Irish pounds each year. Having your dog neutered ensures you are not contributing to this tragic waste of lives.

If you have a male unneutered dog he may stray in search of a bitch in season and aggression with other male dogs is more likely than when neutered. Wandering dogs are more likely to be involved in road traffic accidents and sustain injuries through fighting.

Are there health benefits to my dog?

Female Dogs:

The early neutering of bitches eliminates risks associated with pregnancy as well as the behavioural and physiological changes that occur during the six month reproductive cycle. It has been reported that between 15 and 25% of mature entire (non-neutered) female dogs will develop an infection within their uterus (pyometra). This condition can be fatal and is prevented by spaying.

Spaying dramatically reduces the risk of the bitch developing mammary tumours (breast cancer). Mammary tumours are common in dogs (3 times more common than in humans) representing around 50% of all tumours in dogs. Mammary tumours are most common in entire bitches. Females neutered before 2 and 1/2 years of age have a much lower risk of developing mammary tumours while bitches neutered before their first heat have only a 0.5% risk when compared to intact females.

Spaying also removes the risk of uterine, cervical and ovarian tumours and prevents conditions including pseudo-pregnancy.

Male Dogs:

Castration eliminates the risk of testicular cancer and some other cancers and dramatically reduces the incidence of non-cancerous conditions in the prostate gland. As mentioned above non-neutered male dogs are more likely to stray in search of a bitch in season and this puts them at an increased risk of being involved in road traffic accidents and dog fights.

Castration can reduce aggression and dominance in male dogs, can reduce sibling rivalry and can reduce territorial marking with urine. Certain other behaviours such as dry humping cushions or peoples' legs can also be reduced.

Are there adverse effects to spaying or neutering dogs?

There is always a risk during any surgical procedure and from the general anaesthetic. We try to minimise these risks by assessing your dog's health prior to surgery (we may need to perform additional tests prior to surgery in some cases) and by using modern drugs and gaseous anaesthesia. We would be happy to discuss any concerns you may have regarding these risks prior to surgery with you.

Spayed and neutered dogs are more likely to be obese than non-neutered dogs (due to changes in hormone levels slowing down the body's metabolism). This can be prevented by feeding only appropriate levels of feed, by exercising your dog frequently and monitoring your dog's weight (you are welcome to use our weighing scales for this purpose free of charge).

There is a risk that female dogs may develop urinary incontinence after spaying (4-20%). This condition does respond well to treatment in most cases.

Castration is associated with an increased risk of bladder and prostate cancer. However the incidence of these tumours is very low when compared to testicular cancers or other conditions of the prostate (which are reduced by neutering). There is evidence that spaying and neutering large and giant breeds may increase their risk of developing a type of bone cancer (osteosarcoma). Please note that although the relative risk is higher the incidence of these tumours is thankfully still very low. However, as we

recognise this risk does exist we recommend considering delaying neutering until these breeds of dog reach sexual maturity.

If you have worries about these risks one of our vets would be happy to discuss these in more detail with you. We want you to make an informed decision about what is right for your pet and for your circumstances. If you would like further information we recommend that you visit the following website www.spayaware.ie.

What do I need to do before surgery?

It is important that dogs going for surgery are healthy. Therefore we recommend that dogs are up to date with their vaccinations and worm control before they are neutered/ spayed. It is also important to bring any concerns you may have about your dog's health to the attention of the attending vet prior to surgery.

Food but not water should be withheld from your dog from **9pm** the night before surgery.

When can I collect my dog?

Collection times should be arranged with the vet at the time of admission. Under normal circumstances your dog will be ready for collection after 4 pm. We usually try to contact you after your dog has recovered from anaesthesia as we understand it can be an anxious time for owners.

What do I have to do when I get my dog home?

You will be given discharge instructions when you collect your dog after his/her surgery. Below are some general guidelines.

- Your dog may feel a little groggy the night after surgery. Bring him/her outside for small walks but keep them on a lead and try to prevent your dog becoming too excited. It is also important to ensure that other pets, if present, are not allowed to excite your dog or lick their wound during this time.
- Ensure a quiet, warm, draft-free bed is available.
- Provide only small amounts of food on the first night. Most dogs can consume normal amounts of food the day after surgery.
- We provide Elizabethan collars to most dogs after surgery. These collars are designed to help prevent the dog from licking their wound excessively and pulling out skin sutures before the wound has healed. Some dogs find wearing these annoying (you can remove them to allow them to eat but only under strict supervision). It is only for a few days (until the skin sutures are removed) and we do provide them for your dog's best interest (you can explain to a human but not a canine patient why licking their wound is not a good idea!). If the collar become excessively soiled or chewed we can provide you with a replacement.
- If medication has been prescribed to your dog please follow instructions carefully.
- Until the wound has healed **please exercise your dog on a lead only** and do not allow to swim (this is especially important for female dogs recovering from surgery).
- In most cases skin sutures (stitches) need to be removed **after 10 days**.
- If the wound seems very red or swollen, is discharging, or you have any concerns regarding your dog's demeanour or appetite during the post-surgical period do not hesitate to contact us (065 6829599).