

WHETHER TO SPAY/ NEUTER - THE BEHAVIOUR & HEALTH BENEFITS

Why spay our female dogs and neuter our male dogs?

What advantages are there for the pet who is spayed/neutered instead of being left intact?

What are the disadvantages?

What's in it for the family who will live with that pet?

FAMILY VS CAREER

An intact pet tends to expend a lot of attention and energy in the direction of reproduction. A spayed/neutered pet however, retains the full character of its male or female identity but has more attention and energy to devote to other things. Most pets have careers as companions to humans, and it is through this labour of love they enrich and even extend our lives.

OWNER VS. BREEDER

Since pets produce litters rather than single babies, it's not necessary for a huge percentage of them to reproduce. Plenty of future pets can come from individuals who live with people with resources of time and money and experience to devote to responsible breeding.

If you wish to consider breeding from your pet, sufficient resources for example, must be put aside to care for the pregnant mother, to allow for the possibility of necessary veterinary intervention such as the possibility of difficult birth, including caesarian section. You also need to be prepared for the possibility of the heartbreak associated with maternal and infant deaths.

And also of course be prepared to wean and care for the offspring until they are old enough to go to new homes.

If you feel this is for you, then we advise you to find an expert breeder to mentor you through the whole process.

MALE DOGS

Neutering male dogs usually prevents or improves three problem behaviors: male to male aggression, excessive urine marking and roaming – the inclination to disregard commands because there is a female scent more compelling than you are. These are the reasons that virtually all service dogs for deaf, blind or disabled people are neutered, as are many dogs involved in sports such as agility – they simply train better and are more reliable. Dogs are much more the victims of their own instincts than humans and less able to override impulses.

Intact male dogs can sniff out a female in heat from miles away and may do anything from simply howling, barking or urine marking, to trying to get away to follow this scent. This behaviour places them at risk from road traffic accidents and other injuries through escape/roaming.

Uncastrated males are more likely to get into fights with other dogs and also pose a greater threat of aggression towards people due to higher levels of testosterone present. Neutering reduces these and other negative behaviours, such as urine marking. It is our experience that small dogs are more inclined to urine mark than their larger compatriots so this is the most common reason for neutering them. Highly reactive breeds such as most terriers and large defensive breeds are more likely to engage in male to male aggression which is the most common reason for neutering them.

While neutering male dogs is usually done for social reasons rather than medical reasons, it also rules out the possibility of testicular cancer, certain prostate diseases, some types of hernias and anal tumours.

Neutering does not change your dog's basic personality, which is determined more by genetics and environment rather than sex hormones. It also does not reduce territory guarding, so it has little or no effect on a dog's inclination to guard your home. It does not affect play behavior or if it does, the effect is to increase interest in play with people.

Disadvantages of neutering

In one out of every three or four dogs, neutering alters energy balance enough to lead to possible weight gain unless the energy level of the diet is reduced. If your dog is neutered, we recommend reducing the quantity of food by about 10% initially.

We don't suggest universal neutering of all male dogs but rather that you carry out a 'wait and see' approach. If no behavior problems develop, we don't suggest neutering. But if any do, neutering is a simple procedure and usually results in the elimination of the unwanted behavior problem. Waiting too long for some male dogs, especially tiny terriers and hounds, may make it very difficult to completely house train them. And dogs showing signs of aggression, especially a large breed, can often increase this type of dangerous behaviour to peak about the age of 3.

Six months to one year is usually about the right time to opt for neutering for these problems.

FEMALE DOGS

Female dogs invite breeding only when they are in heat/estrus, which comes approximately twice a year. The interval can vary by breed and by individual dog. Dogs often have 'silent heat' which can go undetected by their human families and result in the dog not being carefully confined during estrus and therefore winding up with an accidental pregnancy.

Studies of dogs in their wild state have shown that not all individuals reproduce – the social structure of the pack and environmental conditions exert control over which pack members mate to avoid overpopulation and starvation. Most pack members just play supportive roles in extra parenting for the pack's pups.

Two or more female dogs in the same home however, in many cases, will not be able to get along and in severe cases will sometimes fight each other to the death – a conflict that would not be necessary in the wild, where one of them would be driven away to form a new pack. Like aggression problems in male dogs, if you wait until the fighting has already begun it may become a habit that is hard to change. Spaying female dogs increases the chance of them living together peacefully.

When in estrus, 'in season' intact female dogs may show erratic behavior, increased barking and a greatly increased propensity to get out of the house or fenced yard. Some dogs stay clean by constant licking, while others may leave stains around the house. You won't be able to leave her outdoors unsupervised for even a second because the scent of her urine (she will urinate quite frequently) attracts males from even a mile or so away. She will have to be closely confined for several weeks twice a year and be denied the fun of walks in the park and activities with other dogs.

Health benefits of spaying

Spayed dogs are less likely to develop breast cancer and will not be at risk for ovarian or uterine tumours. Life threatening uterine infections are relatively common in dogs and necessitate spaying as an emergency rather than an elective procedure. Another common condition – phantom pregnancy and associated lactation which is distressing for the dog with no real puppies to care for- can often follow seasons.

We recommend spaying at 6-7 months old when your pet is physically mature and before the first season. This perpetuates the existing personality and is medically the best time to spay, as recovery time is quicker and the health benefits usually greater at this age. It is not necessary to wait until after a first season – unless your dog has a small (infantile) vulva or if she has a condition called juvenile vaginitis where she experiences an inflammation and discharge from her vulva. In this case we recommend waiting and letting her have one season which usually rectifies both problems.

Disadvantages of Spaying

Spaying is surgery that involves an anaesthetic and the accepted associated risks. These risks are reduced by all Ahvious are greatly reduced by having your male cat astrated the modern procedures and anaesthetic protocols we use and also if the timing of the procedure is elective i.e. undertaken when patients are young and healthy with no other health problems.

In one out of every three of four dogs, spaying alters the energy balance enough to lead to weight gain unless the energy level of the diet is reduced. When your dog is spayed we suggest reducing her food slightly or switching to a lower calorie dense variety of food.

In a small proportion of (especially overweight) spayed dogs, there can be an increased incidence of urinary incontinence in later life. Fortunately this can usually be controlled by medication.

Coat length and texture are both associated with sex hormone levels. As a general rule, male sex hormone enhances hair growth so males are hairier than females. After neutering a female's male hormone (she produces male hormone in her adrenal gland) may affect her coat which can grow thicker and more luxurious. This has no bearing on pets but may be a consideration for people who wish to show their dogs.