



Neutering female dogs

Neutering a female dog involves the permanent surgical removal of the reproductive organs. There are many techniques employed. At Whiskers Vets we perform an Ovariohysterectomy (OVH) by way of a midline incision – this includes the removal of both the ovaries and the uterus. Please book an appointment with one of our vets if you would like more information on the procedure we use here or those available to you.

Before making the decision to have your bitch neutered it is important that you are fully informed of the main advantages and risks of neutering.

Advantages

- Eliminates the risk of pregnancy so they can walk all year round worry free!
 - Not many people are aware that a dog can ovulate anywhere between day 5 and 30 from the first day of bleeding. This means that there is risk of pregnancy which lasts for up to a month, which occurs every 6 months to a year depending on the frequency of the seasons.
- Eradicates unwanted oestrus behaviour and bleeding.
- Many studies show that neutering reduces the risk of developing mammary tumours in the long term, although these studies only included a small number of dogs so we are unable to draw any definitive conclusions. One study suggests that neutering reduces the relative risk of developing mammary tumours by 24% if performed by 2 years of age and another suggests the risk of mammary tumours is nil if bitches are neutered before their first season.
- Eliminates the risk of an infected uterus (pyometra). This is a life threatening disease occurring in 25% of bitches over ten. The recommended treatment involves an emergency ovariohysterectomy (OVH), which requires an anaesthetic in an already ill patient. The risk of infection is also higher after pyometra surgery.

Risks

- There is always a risk of adverse reactions with any general anaesthetic or surgery, which can include death but this is very low, on the contrary most recover remarkably well.
- Some specific risks of OVH include haemorrhage, abdominal infection, break down of the wound, suture material reactions, bruising, inflammation and infection of the wound. Unfortunately post-operative complications such as bruising, inflammation and infection are much more likely in animals than humans undergoing the same procedure – our involvement to try to keep them calm and stop wound interference will go a long way to reduce these risks.
- Can change coat texture/colour.
- There is an association with an increased tendency to gain weight (this can be controlled with dietary management).
- Some studies suggest that neutering can increase the risk of urinary incontinence although the strength of the evidence is poor. The actual risk is quite complex and depends on obesity, breed, size/weight, etc.
- More rare concerns include increased susceptibility to non-reproductive tumours but on careful consideration of the literature there is no strong evidence to support this claim.
- There is some evidence to associate a mild increase in risk of hip dysplasia and cranial cruciate ligament rupture, this is especially seen in Labs/Rotties/German Shepherd dogs. Note that this has been documented as an association with neutered bitches, not a causation.

Age

There is widespread discussion around when is the best time to neuter your pet - specifically whether to neuter before or after the first season. On consulting key opinion leaders and specialists in this field, the answer is that there is simply no definitive answer. At Whiskers we recommend neutering between the first and second season. This is because at this time there is still the benefit of having a significantly reduced risk of developing mammary tumours in future whilst also allowing your dog to be more developed by the time surgery is performed. However, in larger breeds it is often recommended to wait until they are at least 12-18 months before neutering but this decision is made on a case by case basis. There are many other factors to consider when deciding when to neuter your bitch including environmental factors such as if



there is an entire male dog at home, so if you are uncertain, it is always best to consult with your vet.

Getting your dates right ... It's important

If you are neutering your bitch before her first season we recommend this is done at approximately 6 months of age. If neutering post season just make a note of the **first day of their bleed** and then book the surgery **16 weeks later** as this is when the hormonal cycle is most dormant. Your dog will need close supervision for 24 hours after her procedure and as mentioned above, some will experience complications or require monitoring; for example, to prevent self-trauma. Please be aware of this when booking a date.

A note on pseudo pregnancies

It is very common for a dog to develop a pseudo pregnancy (false pregnancy) after her season. This is where her hormones lead her body to believe she is pregnant and you may see signs of nest building, a fuller abdomen and mammary enlargement with or without a milky discharge. If a bitch suffers from a pseudo pregnancy it is most likely that she will get recurrent episodes after subsequent seasons so neutering is recommended. If we detect signs of a pseudo pregnancy at the time of neutering we will recommend the surgery is postponed until the signs have resolved. The majority of pseudo pregnancies will resolve by reducing dietary intake by 25% and increasing exercise. For more persistent or severe cases, medical treatment is often required. The medication prescribed for pseudo pregnancies is hormone based and prescription only so an appointment must be made with a vet to discuss treatment before it can be dispensed.

Pre-operative care

Please make sure your dog has not had any access to food after 8pm the previous evening, water can be left down until approximately 7.30am on the morning of the surgery. Please take your dog for a short walk prior to admittance as this will allow her to go to the toilet. It is not a good idea to tire her too much as she will have a big day ahead of her. Please make sure her coat is as clean as possible as this will reduce the chance of infection. If your dog has any special dietary requirements it is a good idea to bring her own food in for us to give after the surgery. Please let us know if your dog has any behavioural concerns that may affect her/our wellbeing whilst she is with us as we want to minimise stress and anxiety where ever possible for our patients.

Admission for surgery

On arrival at the surgery, you can expect to be seen by a vet or a veterinary nurse who will check that you understand the nature of the operation and will examine your dog to look for any signs of being unwell or pseudo pregnancy. They will ask you to read and to sign a consent form for the procedure and ask you to supply contact phone numbers. Although we do not expect any trouble, it is very important that we can contact you in case of an emergency during the day so please keep your phone at hand.

Post-operative care

Bitches generally recover well from the surgery. Post-operative pain relief and two post-operative checks are included in the cost of the procedure.

It may be necessary for your bitch to either wear a collar or a pet t-shirt to stop them licking the wound as it heals. If your dog is allowed to lick the area, they may pull out the sutures or cause inflammation and or infection. Please discuss your preference between a pet shirt and collar with your vet or nurse on the day of the procedure.

It is important to monitor your dog closely for 24 hours following the procedure. Some dogs will require further monitoring depending on their individual reaction to the general anaesthetic/procedure. Please be aware of this when booking a date for her surgery. You will be given a post-operation care sheet to guide you through this process and you will be allocated a dedicated discharge slot in order to discuss this prior to taking her home. She will require short lead walks for a minimum of 10-14 days post-surgery and then a gradual return to exercise as it takes time for the muscles and skin to heal completely.