



Puppy Newsletter

Neutering

The decision of whether to neuter a dog or a bitch is often a confusing one with lots of information, which is often contradictory. Hopefully this newsletter will answer some of the common questions and help you make a decision, but if you'd like more information, please make an appointment to see one of our vets.

Bitches

If a female dog is not going to be used for breeding then there are clear health benefits in getting her neutered. This is referred to as spaying and involves the removal of both the ovaries and uterus. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association and our Practice recommends spaying for the following reasons:-

1. Unwanted pups are prevented. This removes the problems associated with finding homes, or increasing the stray population.
2. No false pregnancy. False pregnancy is very common in bitches and can occur after each season. It may result in distress to the bitch and anguish to the owner. A bitch undergoing a false pregnancy may produce milk, lose her appetite, show nesting behaviour and become quite aggressive.
3. Pyometra (an infection within the womb) and other womb diseases are avoided. Unspayed bitches can develop pyometra late in life, which then requires life saving surgery. Spaying a healthy bitch does not involve the risks of spaying an older bitch with toxæmia from the pyometra.
4. Reduced risk of mammary tumours. The risk of mammary tumours increases progressively with each successive season. The earlier the bitch is spayed, the lower the



prevalence. Bitches spayed before their 1st season greatly decreases the risk of mammary tumours and spaying before their 2nd season will have a beneficial effect.

5. No oestrus. Oestrus (season or "heat") occurs about every 6 months in entire bitches and will last for approximately 21 days. During this time bitches have to be kept away from other dogs and walked under close guard.

There are some reservations about spaying, but most are not justified when examined more closely. Although spaying is a routine operation, it is major abdominal surgery and therefore not without risks. However, while we should never ignore the risk, it is very small and outweighed by the benefits. Spayed bitches are at slightly increased risk of urinary incontinence than entire female dogs. Thankfully the incidence of incontinence is low, about 17 in a 1000 per animal per year in entire bitches and 22 in a 1000 per animal per year in spayed bitches. In the unfortunate cases where incontinence does occur this can usually be managed with a combination of weight loss,

medication and rarely surgery. Some people are concerned because they feel spaying causes weight gain. While it is true that spaying reduces the metabolic rate and therefore food requirement, as long as the diet is adjusted accordingly to take account for this, any risk of an increase in weight can be easily managed.

The biggest area of debate at present is when is the best time to have a bitch spayed. It is known that the risk of mammary tumours increases with each season and therefore, it is recommended that bitches are spayed before their second season. Therefore, the main debate is whether a bitch should be spayed before or after

her first season. The traditional view was to wait until after the bitch has had her first season. This was thought to reduce the incidence of urinary incontinence in bitches as they get older. However, spaying before the first season has become more common, especially in the State and there is evidence to support both sides of the argument and therefore stating conclusively when is the best time is not possible. What is clear is that there is probably little difference.

If spaying before the first season is chosen, this is normally undertaken at 5-6 months of age. If the bitch has a first season then we prefer to wait for 3 months after the season has ended for the optimum time for spaying.

Dogs

The health benefits to neutering a dog are perhaps less clear cut than spaying of bitches. Neutering of dogs involves the removal of both testicles and is called castration. The British Small Animal Veterinary Association recommends the neutering of dogs should be considered in the following circumstances:

1. As a treatments to limit straying, particularly in response to bitches in season. Straying causes nuisance and unwanted litters.
2. As a treatment for excessive and unacceptable sexual behaviour towards bitches, people and inanimate objects.
3. For medical reasons e.g. to prevent or remove testicular tumours, or reduce perianal adenoma or prostatic hyperplasia.
4. As a treatment in some cases of dominance aggression. Whether castration can be helpful can be proved first by the use of hormone injections.
5. To prevent the perpetuation of genetic defects.

Castration rarely produces undesirable changes in temperament. Any weight change can be controlled by management of the diet. It is notable that there is little problem with male Guide Dogs that have all been castrated.

Castration is usually carried out at 12 months of age, but we can castrate dogs earlier if you are experiencing certain behavioural problems.



Household Hazards

Keeping our dogs healthy and happy is the primary goal of any pet owner. While most people know that chocolate can be poisonous to dogs, there are other potential toxins lurking within our kitchen cupboards that can cause illness, or worse, in our canine friends.

While the chemical theobromide is responsible for the toxic properties of chocolate, caffeine also contributes to its ill-effects. Caffeine is not well tolerated in dogs and can cause hyperexcitability and stress on the heart. Therefore, coffee, either liquid, instant or beans, tea bags and baked goods containing coffee should be kept away from pets. Fruits and vegetables are not completely harmless either. Grapes, including dried products like raisins and sultanas have been recently found to be quite toxic to dogs with symptoms ranging from vomiting to acute kidney failure and even death. Certain artificial sweeteners have also recently been found to cause severe adverse reactions in dogs. Other products to avoid giving your puppy include: macadamia nuts, fatty foods, avocado, onions (especially onion powder) and foods containing alcoholic beverages.

Kitchen bins contain all sorts of potential dangers from cooked bones to tin cans, so please make sure your bin is not accessible to your puppy.



In the Garden

Please be aware that certain garden plants are poisonous to dogs. These include Ragwort, Rhododendron, Ivy, Deadly Nightshade, Foxgloves and Oleander. Always keep garden chemicals locked away from dogs even if the manufacturer claims that the contents are unpalatable and contain a "Proven Pet Repellent" e.g. slug pellets.

Should your puppy ingest any food or product you are unsure of, please contact your veterinary surgery immediately. Always keep the package if possible so the vet can determine exactly what your puppy has eaten.

Don't forget to book your puppy in for their FREE 6 month puppy check. Topics covered will include training, dental care, behaviour problems, diet and neutering. The check up also continues with building up the positive relationship with the vets.