

The Truth About Spay and Neuter Surgery for Dogs

Learn the facts behind what will probably be your dog's only major surgery.

You've heard the myths that spay or neuter surgery makes a dog fat or less protective; now get the facts. The Doris Day Animal Foundation, in conjunction with the organization's annual Spay Day USA, helps answer common questions about spay and neuter surgery.

Q. What does spay and neuter mean for my dog?

Spaying and neutering, the most common surgical procedures performed on animals, prevent animals from being able to reproduce. Females undergo spay surgery (ovariohysterectomy), which involves the removal of her ovaries and uterus. A male gets neuter surgery (orchidectomy), where his testicles are removed.

Q. Does spaying and neutering hurt?

Veterinarians provide dogs with a general anesthetic, so the surgery itself is painless. Any discomfort your dog feels afterward is minimal and part of the normal healing process. In fact, your dog will probably show no sign of discomfort from the procedure, and may attempt to resume normal activity when he or she gets home. Owners need to monitor their dogs to ensure that they do not aggravate the incision. Most dogs can return to normal activity within 3 days.

Q. Does spaying and neutering provide any other health benefits?

Yes. Spaying greatly reduces the risk of breast cancer and prevents various reproductive tract disorders. Neutering often resolves undesirable behaviors such as aggression, marking and roaming, and eliminates the risk of testicular diseases.

Q. Doesn't spaying and neutering make animals less protective?

No. Any changes brought about by spaying or neutering are generally positive. Neutered male dogs usually stop territorial marking. Neutered males tend to fight less and are less likely to become lost due to straying from home in search of a mate. Spayed females do not go into heat or need to be confined indoors to avoid pregnancy. Dogs do not become less protective or loyal to their guardians as a result of being altered.

Q. Is it really necessary to neuter male dogs? They don't give birth!

The old saying "it takes two to tango" is as true for dogs as it is for humans. Intact males are less attached to their human families, and often try to escape in their search for a mate. In fact, your intact dog will likely try repeatedly to escape, and in the process dig up your yard, scratch up your door or chew off his restraint. Males that roam in search of a mate are susceptible to injury by cars or in fights with other males. And while a female dog can only have one litter at a time, male dogs can impregnate many females each day.

Next Step: When should I spay or neuter my dog?