

Canine Castration (Neutering) & Canine Ovariohysterectomy (Spaying)

By John D. Rhoades, DVM, Ph.D.

Canine Castration

The term refers to the surgical removal of the testes in the male dog. Castration may be performed to eliminate the sex drive and the animal's ability to reproduce. The procedure may also be done to remove diseased testes or tumors involving the testes. Castration is also used as a treatment for chronic prostatic disease in the dog.

Some advantages of having your male dog castrated are:

1. It reduces the tendency for many male dogs to ram by eliminating or reducing the animal's sex drive.
2. The tendency toward fighting is reduced in many male dogs.
3. Prostatic disease is virtually unheard of and rarely occurs in castrated male dogs. Prostatic disease is relatively common in older intact male dogs.
4. Exposure to other sexually transmitted diseases is eliminated.

A question commonly asked is will the male dog become fat, lazy or will it reduce the animal's ability to work if the animal is castrated? The answer is no. Obesity is related to caloric intake and the exercise pattern that is established for the dog. Male dogs trained as guide dogs for the blind are castrated. These animals are excellent working animals and great companions. Castration does not diminish their activity or intelligence.

Castration is performed under general anesthesia. Recovery from anesthesia is generally quite rapid and the hospital stay for this surgical procedure is relatively short. Recovery is generally uneventful and after-care is minimal. Depending on breed and rate of maturity, castration is recommended around 8-10 months of age.

Canine Ovariohysterectomy

Ovariohysterectomy is the term applied to the surgical procedure involved in the removal of the uterus and ovaries of a female dog. "De-sexing", "spaying" and "neutering" are common terms used in describing the procedure. The main reason for the procedure is to prevent the heat period and prevent the female dog from having unwanted puppies. Other reasons for performing an ovariohysterectomy may be related to diseases of the ovaries and uterus.

Some questions commonly asked concerning ovariohysterectomy in the bitch are:

- a. Should my dog have a litter first? The answer is NO. It makes no difference whether the animal has had a litter or not.
- b. Will my dog become fat and lazy? NO. Obesity is related to caloric intake and lack of exercise.
- c. Is the surgical procedure dangerous? There is always some risk in any surgical procedure but in health animals the risk is slight.
- d. Will it change my dog's intelligence or personality? The answer is no. Any change in personality or intelligence would have occurred whether the surgery was performed or not.
- e. Is it necessary for the female to go through a heat cycle before the ovariohysterectomy is performed? No, but the surgery is best performed at about 5-1/2 to 9 months of age for the least amount of risk. It is also preferable not to do the surgery while the female is in heat.

There are some major advantages in having an ovariohysterectomy performed on your female dog. They include:

- a. The elimination of the nuisance of the heat period.
- b. The elimination of diseases of the uterus which commonly occur in an older dog.
- c. The elimination of sexually transmitted diseases in the female dog.
- d. If surgery is done at an early age the likelihood of mammary cancer is virtually eliminated.
- e. Removal of the ovaries eliminates the possibility of ovarian tumors.
- f. Certain other endocrine related diseases are prevented.
- g. The risks and stresses of unnecessary pregnancies are eliminated.

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Often the following statement is made: "I want her to have one litter for the children's education". Keep in mind that disposing of an unwanted litter can present quite a different lesson than originally intended. There are better ways of teaching children that do not produce unwanted puppies and animal suffering. Ovariohysterectomy involves major abdominal surgery using general anesthesia. Ordinarily in the young and healthy dog there is only slight discomfort with a short hospital stay and a rapid recovery period.

Before a male dog is scheduled for castration or a female is scheduled for an ovariohysterectomy they should be free of intestinal parasites (worms) and all vaccinations should be current.