NEUTERING FEMALE DOGS

Neutering a female dog involves the permanent surgical removal of the reproductive organs. There are many techniques employed. At Molecare Pet 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 a risk period of a month, every 6 months to a year depending on their cycle.
- Eradicates unwanted oestrus behaviour and bleeding.
- Some studies show a reduced risk of developing mammary tumours although it has not yet been reliably quantified; one study suggests it reduces the relative risk by 24% if performed by 2 years of age.
- 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.

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, breakdown 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
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 and opinions held on the best time to neuter your pet - specifically whether to neuter before or after their first season. On consulting key opinion leaders and specialists in this field, the answer is that there is simply no overall benefit to either - the literature suggests that the advantages and risks shown above are present at either time to a greater or lesser degree.

**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 continue to do so after following seasons. If we detect signs of a pseudo pregnancy at admittance it will be recommended that you do not neuter at that time as this can lead to the signs lasting afterwards. There may be time to treat conservatively with careful use of food and water restriction but there are also options to use a hormone to speed the process up. This is a prescription only medicine so it will need to be discussed with your vet as there are some risks that require discussion before its use.

**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 her lunch.
Please let us know if your dog has any behavioural concerns that may affect her/our wellbeing whilst she is with us.

**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 for any emergencies during the day so please keep a telephone 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 shirt and collar with your vet or vet nurse on the day of the procedure.

It is important to monitor her 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.