



Health Topics

Dogs and cats

MYTHS AND TRUTHS

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Spaying your bitch or queen: yes or no?

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Between myths and truths, the question about whether to spay or not a bitch or a queen often leads to long discussions. Some owners refuse to consider this surgery they see as a mutilation, or an act against nature.

First animals don't react like us. Their wellness will not be disturbed by this surgery or by the fact that they will not be able to reproduce.

In addition, females in the wild regularly reproduce as pregnancy is the normal cycle following a period of heat. Multiple consecutive incomplete cycles (without pregnancy) is not natural and can lead to hormonal unbalance, especially in prolific species, which is not without consequences for health.

Unlike commonly believed, early spaying before puberty will not delay growth and it will allow to reduce the risk to develop mammary tumors to almost zero.

Here are **6 good reasons** to spay your bitch or queen.

Reason N°1

Raising a litter of puppies or kittens at home requires **a lot of work** (care, cleaning, sometimes bottle feeding them several times per day until they are weaned, managing their misbehavior), and has **a cost** (veterinary follow up of pregnancy and delivery, eventually c-section, necessary facilities, food, check-up and vaccinations of the babies). One needs to have time, space and some

budget to consider it. This reality often turns people off when they get confronted to it and this is one frequent reason for hundreds of puppies and kittens to be left behind every year in shelters or worse sometimes even in garbage!!!

Reason N°2

Spayed animals **don't get in heat** anymore, which is the period when the body prepares for ovulation and pregnancy.

In the bitch, this period comes more or less 2 times per year and is characterized by more or less important bloody discharge and vulvar hypertrophy. This period lasts for about 4 weeks and requires to keep a close eye on the bitch in order to prevent undesired mating (walk in leash exclusively, avoid places with other dogs).

In the queen, this period lasts for about one week but comes more or less every 3 weeks if the queen has not been mated. It is characterized mostly by vocal behavior (usually at night), unmistakable posture and often urinary marking behavior.

Reason N°3

Spaying has **a positive impact on health and increase life expectancy** (reduction of the risks of several causes of death)!

Without periods of heat queens tend to stay within a smaller perimeter around their home and bitches are less likely to escape which reduces the risks of accidents.

Spaying eliminates the reproductive cycle which also means no more pseudo pregnancy for bitches (uncomfortable period after the heat caused by

behavior troubles such as anorexia, nervousity and milk production), no more risks of uterine tumors or infections, major reduction of development of mammary tumors.

Reason N°4

Major reduction of damages and other **annoyances due to the presence of feral males** attracted by the heat of the females.

Reason N°5

Overweight is not a fatality !

It is true that due to the hormonal modifications spayed animals have a lower energy turnover (20-30%) than unaltered ones. All you need is to take this in account and reduce accordingly his daily calories intake (amount of food and/or type of food, many reduced calories foods available) and to make him exercise a little!

Reason N°6

Cost of the surgery is far less expensive (2-3 times) than the cost of a c-section, an emergency spaying due to uterine infection or a surgery to remove uterine or mammary tumors.

On the long term, investing preventively in this surgery will make you save money and at the same time will increase your pet's comfort as well as yours.

CONTRACEPTION, WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS ?

Is medical contraception an interesting alternative to surgery ?

If you don't wish for your pet to have a litter, or if you wish to avoid the inconvenience of the heat period you have several different methods of contraception available.

Medical ways :

Biggest advantage is that they are reversible. If you wish for your pet to have a litter, you just have to stop the treatment and wait for the cycles to come back.

- **The pill** : the contraceptive pill contains hormones. A long term use often brings serious adverse effects such as mammary tumors (usually malignant), uterine infections, diabetes, adrenal glands dysfunctions, increase of appetite and obesity, risk of acromegaly. In addition it can have an effect on the quality of the cycles when they return and as a consequence on future fertility. This strategy should only be considered for a short term use.
- **Hormonal injections** : are done at regular intervals every 5 months and have the same side effects due to hormones as the pill. In addition, injections very often induce skin modifications at the site of injection (hair loss, discoloration of coat, calcinosis). This strategy as well should only be considered for a short term use.
- **Contraceptive implant**: Used in bitches by specialists in reproduction. The only interesting medical alternative for a long term use to this day since it is the only to be safe (possible side effects without dramatic consequences for the animal). Effect is fast and completely reversible. Inconvenient is the cost and the necessity to consult a specialist in reproduction since the implant should only be inserted at a specific moment of the cycle.

Surgical ways :

They are irreversible. Your pet will not come in heat and will not be able to have babies anymore. They change the hormonal metabolism by stopping the reproductive cycle. Energy turnover is reduced by 20-30% following the surgery. There is a small risk of urinary incontinence in large breed bitches, but it can usually successfully be managed with a medical treatment.

- **Ovariectomy** : Only ovaries are removed. Uterus is left in place but without the hormonal stimulation he usually atrophies. There is no risk left of uterine infection, and risks of uterine tumors are highly reduced or even absent if the surgery is performed before puberty (before first heat period).
- **Ovariohysterectomy** : Both ovaries and uterus are removed. This is the surgery of choice on an older animal (especially dog) or when the uterus is altered (cats) in order to prevent the risk of tumors or infection after surgery. Advantages and inconvenients are the same as for ovariectomy.

After surgery some medical care are necessary. The animal must stay quiet for at least a week to allow the tissues to heal properly and prevent post surgical complications such as haematomas, seromas, or the rupture of stiches. Wound must be kept clean and stiches are removed after minimum 10 days.

IN SUMMARY :

DIFFERENT CONTRACEPTIVE STRATEGIES ARE AVAILABLE, ALL OF THEM HAVE PROS AND CON, TAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN TO FIGURE OUT THE BEST SOLUTION FOR YOUR PET.

