

Behavior Solutions: Spaying and Neutering your Pet

The Humane Society of the United States has estimated that within six years, one female dog and her offspring could theoretically produce over sixty thousand dogs. They also estimate that an average of eight to ten million animals enter shelters annually, with around half that number being euthanized. With these astounding numbers, is there any reason to aid to a growing pet overpopulation problem by keeping your dog unnecessarily intact?

What is Spaying and Neutering?

Spaying is an operation to remove the reproductive organs from a female animal.

Spaying your female dog will mean she will not come into season, nor will she be able to reproduce. A female dog comes into season starting at around six months of age and then every four to six months. The cycle lasts for about twenty-one days, during which time she can be impregnated. During the heat cycle females have vaginal bleeding that lasts from seven to fourteen days, and some will become restless or nervous acting, and vocalize more than usual. Females spayed before their first heat cycle are less likely to develop tumors and breast cancer.

Neutering is the removal of the testicles from a male animal. Neutering your male dog will prevent the production of male hormones and the possibility of reproduction. Male dogs can sometimes be unilateral or bilateral cryptorchid, where one or both of the testicles are retained. These dogs are typically not able to reproduce, but can sometimes still produce sperm and the hormones that influence sexual behaviors, so should be neutered.

Both operations are performed while your dog is under general anesthesia and he will typically be able to go home on the same day the operation is performed. The risks of the procedure itself are minimal and blood panels are available to make certain that your dog is healthy prior to being put under anesthesia. Depending on how the spay or neuter was performed, stitches may need to be removed afterward. Pre-pubertal operations take place anywhere from two months to one year old, while post-pubertal operations take

place at over one year old. Your vet can help you decide what age is most appropriate for your dog to be altered.

The Unaltered Altering Facts

Having your dog altered actually helps him lead a longer, healthier life. It reduces the risk of cancers of the ovaries, testicles, uterus and breast, as well as decreases the occurrence of prostate disease. These diseases are very detrimental to your dog's well-being and can possibly shorten his lifespan. They are also costly to treat, whereas the cost of spaying or neutering is a comparatively low one-time cost. If you are concerned about the cost of the procedure, talk to your vet about payment plans or for a referral to a low cost spay/neuter clinic or animal shelter that performs the procedure for a reduced cost. You can also contact SPAY/USA, a national referral network of veterinarians at 1-800-248-SPAY.

Since altering prevents the production of reproductive hormones in your dog, many undesired sexual behaviors can be stopped or prevented entirely. This is particularly true if the procedure is performed before your dog reaches puberty (typically around six months). Some of the behaviors that can be prevented are mounting, marking, fighting, indiscriminate breeding and some aggression or dominance. While some of these behaviors can simply be an embarrassing annoyance, others can be dangerous. Females in season may draw unwanted attention from males in the area, and unaltered males sometimes wander in search of them. Wandering can be hazardous for your dog as it puts him at risk of being hit by a car or picked up by local animal control services (a costly fine). Some of the reproductive hormones males produce can also cause them to display aggression towards other dogs and even people. This often results in fighting with other dogs or biting an unwary person. If your dog has had sexual experience prior to the procedure, some of these behaviors may continue until the habit can be broken through training.

Anytime your unaltered dog gets away from you or out of his enclosure could result in an unexpected pregnancy for you or the unsuspecting owner of the other dog involved. Indiscriminate breeding of this kind is largely the cause of overcrowding in shelters, as

well as some behavior problems in pets. As a responsible pet owner, the risk of this happening is simply not worth it or fair to the pets and other owner involved.

Though it is commonly thought that altering your dog will cause him to gain weight, this is not the case. The removal of reproductive organs in your pet will not change his or her metabolism. Your dog will begin to gain weight however, if he is being fed too much or inappropriate food, or if he is not getting sufficient exercise. Whether altered or intact, it is important for all pets to be fed a balanced diet and get plenty of physical exercise. (For more information refer to Triple Crown's "Behavior Solutions: Play and Exercise.")

Altering your dog can make him more affectionate and a better companion to you. It has been shown that altered dogs tend to be less aggressive towards people and other pets of the house, as well as unfamiliar ones. Altering a dog can also sometimes calm him down. Again, most undesired sexual behaviors your dog may display can also be stopped. It should be noted that altering your dog is not a cure for behavioral problems or a replacement for obedience training. Training is the best way to effectively communicate what is expected of your dog and ensure a happy, long lasting relationship. The Pro-Training Clicker is an easy, fun, and motivational way to train your dog.

The Basics of Breeding

Much more time and hard work is involved in responsible breeding than just finding an attractive mate for your dog. A responsible breeder is looking to maintain the integrity of the breed and hopefully better it, not to make money from the sale of puppies. Knowing the behavioral and physical background of both prospective parents, as well as past generations, is a must to best ensure a sound and healthy litter. Many behavioral problems and physical ailments can be passed on through genes allowing disadvantageous conditions to continue for another generation.

Breeding your dog is also quite costly (considerably more than the cost of spaying or neutering your pet). Both the mother and father should receive thorough health screenings to rule out that they will pass any harmful conditions or behavioral traits onto their offspring. The mother will also need prenatal care and frequent vet visits to ensure the health of her and her puppies throughout the pregnancy. Just as in human mothers, pregnancy also takes a physical toll on your dog's body.

Once the puppies are born, you must be able to provide proper care to make sure they are as physically healthy as possible, as well as mentally. Early socialization is a must for a well adjusted puppy. Introducing the pups in a safe and positive manner to a variety of sounds, sights, and situations will help them be better prepared for new experiences in their future homes. Your responsibility doesn't even end there—when the pups are old enough to be away from their mother and littermates, you must find suitable homes for them. This is a time consuming process that involves many considerations to help ensure the best match for both your puppy and his new family: Will the new family be able to properly care for the puppy and meet all his needs? Are there other animals in the new home that may not be compatible? Are you willing to take the puppy back if the match is unsuccessful? The list goes on and on, and all points should be considered carefully before placing one of your pups.

Common Misconceptions on the Matter of Mating

There are several myths and misconceptions regarding spaying/neutering and breeding, some of which have already been covered, but plenty abound or deserve reiteration:

- *My dog will become fat after being spayed or neutered.* Again, neither spaying nor neutering will affect your dog's metabolism. By feeding a healthy, balanced diet and making sure he receives sufficient exercise for his energy level, your dog will remain in top shape.
- *My dog will become lazy or won't want to play as much.* Spaying or neutering will not affect your dog's energy level. This is dependent on the breed of dog he is and his individual temperament. Many spayed and neutered dogs are active in sports and used as working dogs without any hindrance.
- *I want it to be a learning experience for my children.* The odds are that the actual birth will take place at night in a secluded area of your home. It can also make the birth more stressful on the mother to have a large active audience. This lesson can be better taught through more conventional methods that don't take a strain on your pet, time, and wallet.

- *It's better for females to go through at least one heat or have one litter before being spayed.* It has actually shown that female pets that are spayed prior to their first heat cycle are less prone to diseases like breast cancer. Even during the first heat cycle of a young dog, she will be capable of becoming pregnant. Pregnancy in itself is a strain on your dog's body, especially in young dogs, and the associated health risks are much higher than that of the operation.
- *My dog is a purebred.* The Humane Society of the United States estimates that at least one in four animals in shelters is a purebred. Being purebred does not necessarily guarantee the health or stability of a dog, or that a puppy from your purebred litter won't end up in a shelter.
- *I want another dog just like the one I have.* There are many factors that determine the personality and temperament of a dog, like socialization, breed, and genetics. A litter produced from your dog will not guarantee that you will get a puppy that is an exact copy of your dog.

Litter-less but Loved

Spaying or neutering your dog is not only a step towards preventing health problems; it is also a large step in helping prevent the ever-growing pet overpopulation problem. At Triple Crown we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Using our tips and training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you and your dog can make a difference.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Triple Crown Dog Academy created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site:

www.triplecrowndogs.com. All products, guides and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Triple Crown Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Triple Crown Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just

like yours every day; we work with pet enthusiasts just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Triple Crown, the world leader in pet education.

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