

## Neutering the Bitch

The bitch spay, properly known as an ovariohysterectomy, involves the surgical removal of the uterus and ovaries under general anaesthesia. The operation is usually carried out as a day procedure, and rarely requires an overnight stay. In the majority of cases the bitch is back to her normal self the following day, but will need to be kept quiet for the following week or two. Traditionally there are many arguments for and against this procedure, and these are summarised below.

**General anaesthesia** – there is always an inherent risk with any anaesthetic or surgical procedure, whether is the dog, cat, horse or indeed human. At Riverside we minimise these risks as much as possible by carrying out a full pre operative health check and blood test if requested. We use the safest anaesthetic drugs available, combined with constant monitoring by nurses and specialised equipment. We also ensure that any animal undergoing surgery receives adequate pain relief both during and after the procedure.

**Mammary cancer** – mammary lumps are very common in entire bitches, representing one quarter of all tumours found in dogs. Many of these are malignant – meaning they are likely to spread to other organs within the body. By neutering a bitch early the incidence of mammary cancer can be reduced by up to 99% (each season increases the risk of cancer significantly.)

Surgery undertaken in older or ill animals has a higher anaesthetic risk than in young healthy animals. **Pyometra** - a common and potentially life threatening infection of the uterus requires emergency surgery. It generally occurs in old bitches and causes them to be very ill. Spaying removes the risk of the bitch developing this condition that sadly causes deaths every year.



Once a bitch is spayed she will not have any more seasons. This means that she will not have a discharge from her vulva and is much less prone to attack from amorous males. Many bitches have **false pregnancies** following seasons which can make them grumpy, aggressive and moody and can cause ill health. Removing her reproductive organs prevents this. Once spayed, it is impossible to become pregnant, removing the risk of unwanted puppies.

When bitches are spayed there is a risk that they may develop urinary incontinence later in life due to changes in hormone levels. Less than 10% of bitches spayed before their first season may display some degree of urinary incontinence. Neutered bitches may tend to put on weight due to changes in the metabolism. This can be prevented easily by **controlling feed intake** or feeding a 'light' diet, and ensuring the dog is exercised regularly. Some bitches may have changes to their coat after neutering, and can become more fluffy and thick coated.

**Behaviour** can be affected by neutering, both in bitches and dogs. If an animal is aggressive towards people or other animals, the first course of action a behaviourist usually advises is to have them neutered because this removes many of the hormonal influences on the dog. In many cases the animal will become calmer and easier to manage, and usually interaction with other animals is much less confrontational. There is no proven benefit, either to the health or behaviour of bitches in allowing them to have a litter of pups. This does however lead to more dogs in the world when already rescue centres are bursting at the seams.

**Approximately 2,500 dogs were reported to have been euthanased last year** due to not being able to find homes.

At Riverside in our opinion the **benefits of spaying bitches** far outweigh the potential problems and we would advise that all bitches not intended for breeding are neutered. There is a lot of debate about the best time to neuter as spaying early can prevent some problems (i.e. mammary tumours) but may potentially have a higher risk of other problems (i.e. incontinence). The breed of dog is also an important factor as larger breeds mature later. It is best to discuss this with one of our vets as each dog has individual requirements. Usually bitches are spayed at six months of age (before their first season) or in some cases three months after their first season. However it is never too late to gain some health benefits from the procedure, and we would recommend that older bitches are also spayed, usually three months after a season.

Obviously the decision to neuter your pet is up to you, the owner, but we hope the information here helps and clears up some confusion. If you have any questions regarding neutering of the bitch, or any other queries regarding your pet, please do not hesitate to contact us at the surgery.