

Neutering Your Dog

Neutering, or orchietomy, is a surgical sterilization procedure that can provide major health benefits for dogs. Here are some important facts you should know before getting your dog neutered.

The Neuter Surgery

Orchietomy is a surgery that is performed under general anesthesia. Your dog's belly will be shaved and cleansed, and an incision will be made between his scrotum and the base of his penis. The veterinarian will remove both testicles and tie off the spermatic cords. The skin incision is closed with stitches or surgical adhesive. Following neuter surgery, your dog will no longer produce sperm and he will have lower testosterone levels.

Although neutering is very routine, it still carries the risks associated with general anesthesia and surgery. Your veterinarian takes numerous measures to keep your dog safe, such as checking his heart and lungs before administering anesthesia and monitoring him constantly while he is asleep. You can ask whether your veterinarian recommends any additional safety precautions, such as pre-anesthetic blood tests or administration of IV fluids during the procedure.

Benefits

The normal behavior of an un-neutered dog is often incompatible with being a household pet. Intact dogs tend to wander from home, seeking a mate or defending their territory. This puts them at risk for being hit by a car or being injured in a dog fight. Urine marking and some types of aggression are more pronounced in un-neutered dogs as well. Although neutering may not entirely eliminate these behaviors, it can diminish them by 50-90%.

Intact male dogs suffer from a high incidence of inflammation and enlargement of the prostate, as well as testicular tumors. Older dogs commonly develop swollen and infected prostate glands. These conditions are painful and can interfere with urination and defecation. After neutering, the prostate shrinks considerably. Tumors of the testicles, common in older intact male dogs, are eliminated entirely.

The final benefit of neutering is that it's the best way you can help end pet overpopulation. Every year, 3-4 million cats and dogs are euthanized in U.S. animal shelters. None of us wants to contribute to that sad statistic, but we may do so unwittingly. Puppies adopted to apparently good homes may be given away or lost. Even purebred dogs end up homeless. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that 25% of the dogs in U.S. animal shelters are purebred!

Considerations Before Surgery

Consult with your veterinarian about when to schedule your dog's neuter surgery. Traditionally, pets are neutered at around six months of age. However, some veterinarians advocate performing the procedure earlier. The night before your dog's surgery, remove his food and water before you go to bed. He should not eat or drink anything during the night or the morning of his surgery.

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Considerations After Surgery

Your dog may go home the day of his surgery, or may stay in the hospital overnight. If he goes home the same day, expect him to feel a little groggy. Keep him indoors, in a warm, safe, quiet room away from other pets. During the first week after surgery, try to restrict his activity level. Leash walks are OK, but avoid excessive running, jumping, and roughhousing.

Check his incision daily. Stitches, if present, will need to be removed in about 10-14 days. If you notice your dog licking his incision frequently, ask for an Elizabethan collar. Many dogs develop a swollen or slightly bruised scrotal area following neuter surgery. Some swelling is normal, but don't be afraid to ask your veterinarian if you are concerned about your dog.

The effects of neutering on your dog will not be instantaneous. Testosterone levels wane over a period of weeks or months, followed by a reduction in fertility and territorial and mating behaviors.

