

## Spaying Your Dog

Spaying, or ovariectomy, 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 spayed.

### **The Spay Surgery**

The ovariectomy is an abdominal surgery that is performed under general anesthesia. Your dog's belly will be shaved and cleansed, and an incision will be made a few inches below her belly-button. The veterinarian will remove both ovaries as well as the uterus. Several layers of stitches will close the incision internally. Your veterinarian may also close the skin with stitches, or may use a surgical adhesive. Following spay surgery, your dog will no longer go through heat cycles and will be unable to get pregnant.

Although the spay surgery is very routine, it is still a major abdominal operation. It carries the risks normally associated with general anesthesia and surgery. Your veterinarian takes numerous measures to keep your dog safe, such as checking her heart and lungs before administering anesthesia and monitoring her constantly while she 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**

Unspayed female dogs usually go through two heat periods each year. During her heat period, your female dog may drip blood. She will also make every effort to sneak out to find a mate. As a result, she is at high risk for being hit by a car.

Unspayed female dogs suffer from a high incidence of mammary tumors, false pregnancies, uterine infections, and reproductive cancers. Breast tumors are the most common type of cancer in dogs. One out of every four unspayed dogs will get breast cancer, and half of the tumors are malignant. Unspayed dogs are also prone to pyometra, a life-threatening infection of the uterus. Spaying removes the possibility of diseases of the ovaries and uterus, and comes close to eliminating the chance of mammary tumors.

The final benefit of spaying 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. In six years, one female dog and her offspring can produce as many as 67,000 dogs!

### **Considerations Before Surgery**

Consult with your veterinarian about when to schedule your dog's spay surgery. Traditionally, pets are spayed at around six months of age. However, some veterinarians advocate performing the procedure earlier. If possible, schedule your dog's surgery when she is not in heat.

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The night before your dog's surgery, remove her food and water before you go to bed. She should not eat or drink anything during the night or the morning of her surgery.

### **Considerations After Surgery**

Your dog may go home the day of her surgery, or may stay in the hospital overnight. If she goes home the same day, expect her to feel a little groggy. Keep her indoors, in a warm, safe, quiet room away from other pets. During the first week after surgery, try to restrict her activity level. Leash walks are OK, but avoid excessive running, jumping, and roughhousing. Be sure to check her incision daily. Mild swelling and soreness are common, but let your veterinarian know if you see any discharge or if the swelling is excessive.

If your dog was in heat when she was spayed, she will continue to attract males during this time. Keep her away from male dogs during her recovery so that she isn't accidentally injured. Stitches, if present, will need to be removed in about 10-14 days. If you have any concerns about your dog following her surgery, do not hesitate to call your veterinarian.

