



Humane Society of Tampa Bay

Animal Health Center

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Canine Spay Fact Sheet

What are the health benefits to my female dog?

1) Mammary cancer: A female dog spayed before her first heat will have a near zero chance of developing mammary cancer. After the first heat, this incidence climbs to 7% and after the second heat the risk is 25% (one in four!). It is easy to see that an early spay can completely prevent a potentially fatal form of cancer.

But is it too late if a dog is already past her second heat? No, spaying is important even in female dogs that already have obvious tumors. This is because many mammary tumors are stimulated by estrogens; removing the ovaries, the source of estrogens, will help retard tumor spread.

2) Pyometra: Pyometra is the life-threatening infection of the uterus, which generally occurs in middle-aged to older female dogs in the six weeks following heat. The hormone progesterone causes the proliferation of the blood-filled uterine lining and the suppression of uterine immune function. During or immediately after a heat cycle, bacteria in the vagina can ascend to the uterus to cause infection. The uterus fills with pus, bacteria, dying tissue, and toxins. She must be spayed quickly if her life is to be saved.

3) Simple convenience: The female dog comes into heat every 8 months or so. There is a bloody vaginal discharge and attraction of local male dogs. Often there is an offensive odor. Your pet may become pregnant. The average litter size for dogs is 6-10 puppies, and your female dog may have 2 litters yearly.

Nationwide, more than 3 million cats and dogs, often the offspring of cherished family pets, are euthanatized in shelters. If you do find homes for your pet's puppies, they may not remain in these loving homes. Spay/neuter is the only permanent, 100% effective method of birth control for dogs and cats.

What changes can be expected after the surgery?

The female dog's reproductive tract is dormant for most of the year. It only activates for the 3 week period of heat. This means that from a behavioral stand point, the female dog acts spayed most of the time. It is unlikely that any change will be evident.

A small percentage of spayed female dogs may need hormone therapy as they get older. Report any urine leaking to your veterinarian.

After having a spay, a female dog may no longer be interested in some of the activities she once was interested in. Depending on how much energy she used to spend on these activities, she may be less active. Actually becoming listless or uninterested in exercise is not a normal consequence of a having a spay surgery. If your pet appears to be gaining weight, you should seek advice about decreasing the amounts of food you are feeding. This is something that must be assessed on an individual basis but fear of weight gain should not be an obstacle to the health benefits of spaying your pet.

What exactly is done surgically?

An incision is made on the midline of the abdomen, and the three points where the ovaries and uterus attaches are tied off and cut. The abdomen is checked for bleeding and two or three layers of stitches are placed to close the incision. The skin incision may or may not have stitches.

What can I expect upon discharge from the Animal Health Center?

Your pet may act sedated for up to 24 hours after anesthesia. If your pet acts painful, please call the Animal Health Center at (813) 870-3304 as some animals require additional pain medication. Some nausea may occur after surgery and it would not be unusual for the pet to refuse food for a day or two after surgery. A cough may persist for a couple of days as a result of the endotracheal tube use.

Dogs show a propensity to lick or chew at incision sites and will need an "E-Collar" to restrict access to the stitches. This is not very comfortable for the dog but must be used strictly until the incision is healed.

Activity should be restricted during the 1-2 weeks following surgery. Excessive activity can lead to swelling of the muscle or fluid accumulation under the incision. If a fluid pocket forms, it should resolve on its own after a few weeks. If a fluid pocket forms and drains liquid from the incision, the dog should be re-checked with the veterinarian.

At what age can ovariectomy (spay) be performed?

Our veterinarians are skilled at pediatric surgery; the spay can be performed at any age after 8 weeks of age. Dogs spayed before puberty (generally age 6 months) may grow a bit bigger than dogs spayed after puberty (hormones are involved in causing the bones to stop growing.) Traditionally, spaying the dog was recommended at 6 months of age and many veterinarians still recommend this.

What if I have questions after surgery?

Call our Animal Health Center telephone number at (813) 870-3304 if you think of additional questions after discharge. If you think you have an emergency after hours, you will find emergency contact numbers for local emergency animal hospitals in your discharge packet.