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Canine Neuter Facts

Prepared for Your Pet Animal

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS TO THE DOG?

There are several health benefits to neutering. One of the most important involves the prostate gland, which, under the influence of testosterone will gradually enlarge over the course of the dog's life. As it enlarges it is likely to become uncomfortable, often becoming large enough to interfere with urination and defecation. This is termed prostatic hyperplasia. Also, the prostate under the influence of testosterone is predisposed to infection (prostatitis), which is almost impossible to clear up without neutering. Neutering causes the prostate to shrink in size, thus preventing both prostatitis as well as the uncomfortable benign hyperplasia that occurs with aging. It is often erroneously held that neutering prevents prostate cancer but this is not true.

Other health benefits of neutering include the prevention of certain types of hernias and tumors of the testicles and anus. Neutering also reduces excessive preputial discharge.

WHAT BEHAVIORAL CHANGES CAN BE EXPECTED AFTER NEUTER?

The only behavior changes that are observed after neutering relate to behaviors influenced by male hormones. Playfulness, friendliness, and socialization with humans are *not* changed. The behaviors that change are far less desirable. The interest in roaming is eliminated in 90% of neutered dogs. Aggressive behavior against other male dogs is eliminated in 60% of neutered dogs. Urine marking is eliminated in 50% of neutered male dogs. Inappropriate mounting is eliminated in 70% of neutered dogs.

AT WHAT AGE CAN NEUTERING BE PERFORMED?

Dogs neutered before puberty (generally age 6 months) tend to grow a bit bigger than dogs neutered after puberty (testosterone is involved in the causing bones to stop growing so without testosterone the bones stop growing later). Neutering can also be performed in the geriatric patient should the prostate gland become enlarged or infected. The traditional age for neutering is around 6 months of age and many veterinarians still recommend neutering at this age.

The benefits of neutering (both health and behavioral) can still be obtained regardless of the age at which neutering is performed.

WILL HE GET OVERWEIGHT OR LETHARGIC?

Activity level may decrease to a mild degree, only to the extent that the dog is less inclined to roam and chase. Appetite does not change after neutering. A male dog should not gain weight or become less interested in activity simply due to the neutering itself. Some dogs should be placed on less energy-dense diets if their activity level drops significantly after neutering.

WILL HE STILL BE INTERESTED IN FEMALES?

His interest will be reduced; however, if he is around a female dog in heat, she will arouse him. Mounting behavior often has roots in the expression of dominance and may be expressed by a neutered male in a variety of circumstances that are not motivated by sexuality.

WHAT EXACTLY IS DONE SURGICALLY?

The procedure is termed castration. An incision is made just forward from the scrotum. The testicles are removed through this incision. The stalks are tied off and cut, effectively removing the testicles and portions of their blood supply. The skin incision is usually closed with stitches under the skin where they are not visible. As with all surgical procedures, preanesthetic bloodwork prior to anesthesia is required.

WHAT IF A DOG HAS AN UNDESCENDED TESTICLE?

Undescended testicles have an increased tendency to grow tumors. They may also twist on their stalks and cause life-threatening inflammation. If there is one descended testicle, this one will be fertile; however *since retaining a testicle is a hereditary trait, it is important that the male dog not be bred before he is neutered.* For these reasons, neutering is recommended for dogs with undescended testicles. This procedure is more complicated than a routine neuter; the missing testicle can be under the skin along the path it should have descended to the scrotum or it may be inside the abdomen. Some exploration may be needed to find it, thus there is often an incision for each testicle. The retained testicle is sterile and under-developed.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT UPON DISCHARGE FROM THE HOSPITAL?

The scrotum is often swollen in the first few days after surgery, leading some people to wonder if the procedure was really performed. If the dog is immature at the time of neutering, the empty scrotum will flatten out as he grows. If he is mature at the time of neuter, the empty scrotum will remain as a flap of skin. Sometimes the incision is mildly bruised but this is not unduly sore for the dog. Most male dogs are eager to play by the day after surgery; however allow for the surgical site to heal properly, it is necessary to restrict the dog from boisterous activity. We routinely dispense pain medication to your dog before and after surgery.

Adapted from "Canine Neuter FAQ's" by Wendy Brooks, D.V.M.