

Family planning for your dog

If your dog is young, fit and healthy and you have decided not to breed from him/her in the future, we fully recommend neutering, which has a number of advantages:

1. Preventing unplanned, unwanted and costly offspring
2. Eliminating certain cancers and diseases
3. Reducing aggression, straying, spraying and other anti-social behaviour

Although surgery is involved, most patients recover so quickly that they stay with us for only a few hours, followed by a period of rest at home. By the time the stitches are removed 10 days later, your pet will be more than ready to resume normal exercise.

A neutered animal will have a lower metabolic rate, so we recommend that you decrease the amount (and incidentally the cost) of food given to prevent weight gain.

Females

The onset of puberty is generally between 6 and 12 months, although this may be earlier in small breeds, later in large breeds.

It may take some time for a regular pattern to become established, but on average, a bitch will come into season (also known as being on heat) every 6-7 months, and although fertility will decrease with age, her seasons will continue throughout life.

Even if there has been no mating during a season, most bitches undergo a degree of false pregnancy exhibiting restlessness, behavioural changes and possible milk production, abdominal enlargement and nesting.

Hormonal methods may be used to prevent breeding, and are useful if there are medical reasons which make an operation inadvisable or for short term control, such as if your bitch is likely to come into season whilst on holiday.

The other option is an operation known as neutering or spaying to remove the uterus and ovaries. This is best done about 3 months after a season when any signs of false pregnancy should have subsided. Spaying at the age of 6-7 months, ie. before the first season in most cases, has the great advantage of virtually eliminating the risk of mammary tumours developing in later life.

Occasionally a spayed bitch might experience urinary incontinence when reaching middle to old age. This condition can successfully be treated with medication added to her food.

Males

Dogs generally reach sexual maturity from 4 - 18 months, with smaller breeds earlier and larger breeds later. Normally, both testicles should have descended into the scrotum by the age of 3 - 4 weeks. Occasionally one or both are retained in the abdomen into adult life, and it is strongly recommended that they be removed, as a high percentage will become cancerous.

Entire (ie un-neutered) dogs will exhibit mounting behaviour, roaming if there is a local bitch in season, and possible temperament changes. With increasing age, the prostate may begin to enlarge and press on surrounding organs. Symptoms include difficulty in passing urine and/or faeces.

As with females, there are two options to help birth control:

The chemical method is an injection to neutralise male hormones. It takes effect within 24 - 48 hours of administration, and lasts for 4 to 6 weeks. There are no side effects, and the injection can be repeated as necessary. This method is very useful for the temporary suppression of libido, but may prove expensive if used long term. In addition, if an in-season bitch is within reach, mating might still occur, so it should not be relied upon for contraception.

Castration is the surgical removal of both testicles and is a much simpler operation than spaying a bitch. Because of the strong correlation between male hormones and behaviour - dogs castrated before puberty will often continue to act like puppies - we advise that dogs are not castrated until they mature. If sexual behaviour is a problem in younger dogs, then chemical control can be used as an interim measure.

For more information about family planning, or to make an appointment for your dog to be neutered, please contact the reception team on 01435 864422

