



## Why neuter your dog?

Neutering (de-sexing) of non-breeding household pets can have significant health benefits and reduce the risk of developing serious illnesses later in life, improving wellbeing and saving money in the long run.

### Population and community benefits

There are currently thousands of dogs and puppies in UK rescue centres waiting for homes. Neutering ensures dogs cannot breed and add to the overwhelming dog population needing to be rescued and rehomed.

### Health and behavioural benefits

**Male dogs** - male dogs may exhibit urine marking, mounting objects or leg humping. Intact males can sniff out a female in heat from miles away and may do anything to follow this scent. This places them at higher risk of road traffic accidents and other injuries caused by attempting to escape, roaming or running off lead. They are more likely to get into fights with other dogs and can pose a higher risk of aggression towards people due to high levels of testosterone. It is important to note that while testosterone can influence some types of unwanted behaviour, it is possible that once a dog learns a particular behaviour and finds it beneficial, the behaviour may not stop after castration. In these cases, it can be beneficial to seek the help of a qualified behaviourist.

If a dog exhibits anxious or scared behaviour, the presence of testosterone can act as a confidence booster. The loss of testosterone after castration can mean that an anxious dog may be more likely to react when feeling under threat. In these cases, we recommend trialling chemical castration or consulting a qualified behaviourist before booking in for permanent surgical castration.

Castrated dogs cannot get testicular cancer. The incidence of anal tumours, certain prostatic diseases and perineal hernias are reduced by castration.

**Female dogs** – female dogs can undergo behavioural changes when in season (heat) due to hormonal fluctuations. This includes heightened anxiety, clinginess, mood swings, restlessness, changes in appetite and attempting to escape to find a mate.

Most females have two seasons a year. During this time they typically discharge blood from their vulva for 7-10 days. Spaying prevents these potentially messy seasons and unwanted pregnancies. Following a season, unneutered females may undergo “phantom” pregnancies and are at risk of developing life-threatening womb infections that can require emergency surgery. Neutering prevents these conditions, as well as ovarian cysts, tumours and womb cancer. Spaying early dramatically reduces the likelihood of developing breast cancer later in life.

### Timing - when should I neuter my dog

Neutering is not recommended until a pet has reached sexual maturity, For **small breed** dogs this is typically from 6 months of age, although for male dogs it is recommended to wait until 12 months to allow for full behavioural development. In all **larger dog breeds** (over 20kg adult weight), the advice is

to wait until they are at least 12 months old, due to the complex effects hormones have on skeletal development. In **giant breeds**, it is considered best to wait until 18 months. Dachshunds have their own specific recommendation of waiting until over 12 months old, regardless of gender.

As a general rule, spaying should be performed 4 months after a bitch starts a season.

### **Chemical castration**

Chemical castration is an alternative to surgical castration. It is an injectable hormone implant which suppresses testosterone production, thus causing temporary infertility. It lasts for approximately 6 or 12 months (depending on the implant) and is sometimes recommended as a precursor to surgical castration. It can highlight what effects the removal of testosterone may have on a male dog's behaviour (particularly anxious behaviour) for a temporary period. This can help with the decision of whether to proceed with permanent surgical castration.

### **Common myths**

#### **Will neutering change my dog's personality?**

No, personality is derived from genetics and developed from environmental factors, rather than sex hormones. However, if hormones are driving some of your pets' behaviours, you may see these behaviours change.

#### **Will my dog gain weight after neutering?**

With an appropriate diet and plenty of exercise there is no reason your dog should gain weight, however it is possible your dog may require less food after neutering.

#### **Should a female dog have a litter of puppies before being spayed?**

There is currently no documented health benefit associated with this. Pregnancy can come with health complications and presents more risk than neutering.

#### **Is it better to neuter following their first season?**

This advice is a subject of much debate, based on studies conducted many years ago which have since been disproven. We recommend looking at each dog on a case-by-case basis, as there is no one correct answer.