

WHY WE RECOMMEND THE SPAYING OF FEMALE DOGS

Sterilization of the female dog is commonly performed surgically via the "spay," in which both ovaries and the uterus are removed. It is a major surgery, though a commonly performed one. This web site hopes to address the usual questions owners have regarding this procedure.

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 what is frequently a very difficult and potentially fatal form of cancer. But is it too late if a dog is already past her second heat? No, in fact spaying is important even in female dogs who 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. Spaying removes both the uterus and both ovaries and is crucial in the prevention as well as the treatment of mammary cancer.

SIMPLE CONVENIENCE

The female dog comes into heat every 6 to 8 months or so. There is a bloody vaginal discharge and attraction of local male dogs. Often there is an offensive odor. All of this disappears with spaying.

WHAT HAPPENS WE YOUR DOG IS SPAYED?

- It is very important that the patient has not been fed for at least 8 hours prior to surgery. Anesthetic medications commonly induce nausea and vomiting can be very dangerous in a sedated patient (vomit can be inhaled/aspirated leading to pneumonia).
- A preoperative evaluation is performed; including blood work consisting of a Complete Blood Count blood work is recommended for older females. An intravenous catheter may be placed to facilitate the administration of anesthetic drugs, for any fluid administration, and for use in case of emergency. This necessitates shaving a small patch of skin on one of the legs. Should you notice such a shaved patch, this is undoubtedly from an intravenous catheter.
- A tranquilizer or other pre-anesthetic medication may be administered to ease the induction of anesthesia. A special medication is given intravenously to induce sleep. This medication is called an "induction agent" and lasts only long enough to establish the maintenance of anesthesia by the inhalant anesthetic (gas). Once the pet is asleep, an tube is placed in the throat to insure that a clear airway is maintained through out the procedure. Sometimes a cough is noted for a couple of days after surgery. This may have been caused by the tube in the throat. Such coughs only last a couple of days; anything that persists longer should be re-evaluated. The tube is hooked up to a special machine to deliver a specific concentration of inhalant gas mixed in 100% oxygen. A special technician is assigned to the monitoring of this pet so that the concentration of inhalant gas can be changed, color, heart rate, respiration and other parameters are followed.
- In the surgical prep area, the abdomen is shaved and scrubbed. The bladder is emptied and the patient is moved to a surgical suite, where she is draped with special clothes or papers to isolate the area where surgery will take place.
- 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. At Woodland West, we place all the sutures underneath the skin so as to be less irritating. These sutures will be absorbed over time, so they will not need to be removed.
- The anesthesia technician continues monitoring until the pet dog wakes up and coughs out the throat tube. The patient is kept in an observation room until she is able to walk.
- Our hospital feels strongly that a night in the hospital is important to an uneventful recovery. This night in the hospital is analogous to strict bed rest, just what you would

expect to be needed after a major abdominal surgery. This night also allows for proper administration of pain medication for a longer time period as well as a post-operative check up with the doctor the morning after surgery.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT HOME:

- Most spay patients go home the next day as if nothing had happened though some will need pain medication for a few days.
- Some nausea may occur in the first couple of days after surgery and it would not be unusual for the pet to refuse food for a day or two after surgery.
- As noted above, a cough may persist for a couple of days as a result of the throat tube. This should not persist longer than a couple of days.
- Dogs who show a propensity to lick their stitches will need an Elizabethan or "E" collar to restrict access to the stitches. This is not very comfortable for the dog but must be used strictly until the stitches are out and the incision is healed.
- Activity should be restricted during the week following surgery. Excessive activity can lead to swelling or fluid accumulation under the incision. If a fluid pocket does form, 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.

WHAT ABOUT BEHAVIORAL CHANGES?

The female dog's reproductive tract is dormant for most of the year. It only activates for the three 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.

HEALTH BENEFITS FROM SPAYING ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO IGNORE.

PLEASE CALL FOR SPAY SCHEDULING FOR YOUR FEMALE DOG.