

GOOD REASONS TO HAVE YOUR DOG SPAYED EARLY IN LIFE

by: Louise Langlais-Burgess, D.V.M.

Hespeler Animal Hospital • 210 Pinebush Road, Cambridge, ON • Tel.: (519) 740-7706

Q. Should I have my 6-month old dog spayed now or should I let her have one heat first? A friend once told me my dog would have a better temperament after raising a litter of puppies. What is your opinion?

A. There are several reasons that veterinarians recommend a dog spayed at 6 months of age, before her first heat. One reason is that her reproductive organs will still be quite small, making surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus relatively simple and much safer. During and after a heat period, the uterus becomes enlarged by 4 to 6 times, and the blood vessels become thickened and engorged. The surgery now becomes much more involved, and also slightly more risky for the dog. This is why most veterinarians will charge more to spay a mature bitch than an immature one, and some will refuse to perform the operation while a dog is in heat.

Another excellent reason to spay a dog at an early age is to prevent breast cancer. Yes dogs can as well as women get breast cancer. Fifty per cent of intact bitches will develop breast cancer, and fifty per cent of these tumors are malignant. A dog spayed before her first heat has less than a one per cent chance of developing mammary cancer, while one spayed after her first heat has approximately a ten per cent chance. The percent continues to increase with age.

A spayed female is unable to procure pyometra a serious and life-threatening uterine infection. Many an owner has been saddened to learn that a spay operation performed when the pet was young and healthy would have prevented putting her through a very risky emergency surgery, the only effective way of curing pyometra. Unfortunately, pyometra usually develops in intact females over 9 to 10 years of age, at a time when they are no longer a good anesthetic candidate. The fact that bacteria and toxins within the infected uterus makes these dogs gravely ill does not make the anesthetic any safer either.

As for your friend's suggestion of allowing your pet to have one litter before having her spayed, I strongly disagree. Contrary to the common misconception that it will improve her disposition, many a dog in heat becomes anxious and irritable, and some will become aggressive or even vicious in protecting their puppies. Neutered pets are much calmer and more affectionate towards their owners.

The time, effort, and money required to raise a litter of puppies for 8 weeks is more than most people envisage. Also, many do not stop to think of the possible health risk pregnancy and delivery may present to their beloved pet, especially if she comes to require a Caesarian-section. The task of finding homes for the puppies will exhaust your reserve of friends. At some point you may very well be heartbroken when some or all of the puppies do not get

adopted. There just aren't enough good homes for the dogs and cats we have, which is why over 15 million dogs and cats are put to death in North America. I am sure your friend would quickly change his or her mind after spending a few hours at the local pound or Humane Society, watching the unfortunate veterinarian slated for the chore of euthanizing litter after litter of unwanted puppies and kittens. Please do not add to this already significant problem. The job of breeding purebred dogs is best left to a professional breeder who is knowledgeable about and interested in bettering the breed.

As you can now see, veterinarians not only recommend spaying as a form of birth control, but also to prevent many diseases the female can develop at an older age. It is no coincidence that spayed dogs lead healthier and longer lives than intact females. Feel free to discuss the benefits of spaying with your veterinarian, and please book the surgery soon!

