Spaying and Neutering: A Review of the Health Risks

“When should my pet be spayed/neutered, Doc?” is a question I get almost daily, but the answer isn’t as simple as it seems. There are a lot of factors that weigh into this decision for each of my patients, and I thought I would share them with you in this month’s newsletter.

Why are shelters spaying/neutering so young?

Pet overpopulation has made it necessary to spay/neuter pets before they leave an animal shelter or rescue group. Every medical professional that I know would rather alter a pet really young, than euthanize unwanted litters. Yes, there are some health issues that can develop from young spaying and neutering, particularly in large to giant breed dogs. But in the rescue community, it is better than the alternative.

What are some of the health issues that can develop from spaying/neutering?

In female dogs, there is a possible increased risk of urinary incontinence after spaying, especially if they are larger dogs and were spayed before 3 months of age. Being spayed young can result in a recessed juvenile vulva, which can be more difficult to keep clean, causing dermatitis and bladder inflammation (particularly if they are overweight).

Sex hormones tell the growth plates in the bones when to close (i.e. “stop growing”). When the hormonal influence on the skeleton is removed, large and giant breed dogs especially will have a longer-limbed conformation, which can predispose them to orthopedic disease. When the hind limbs bones are longer than what would have been “normal” for that dog, it changes the angle in the knee-this may be why many large-breed dogs are suffering from cruciate ligament tears/injuries.

In a study on Golden Retrievers, hip dysplasia in males neutered at younger than 12 months was double that of intact males, with an earlier disease onset. No significant difference in hip dysplasia was seen in females.

Golden Retrievers spayed before 1 year of age, or who remained intact were 4x LESS likely to developed hemangiosarcoma (the bleeding spleen tumor) that females spayed after 1 year of age. No differences were found amongst male Golden Retrievers. It appears timing may be everything!

Obesity in pets after they are spayed/neutered can have many factors. After spaying, a female cat requires 33% less calories and a male cat requires 28% less-something we need to keep in mind! There is discussion in the veterinary community regarding increased femoral fracture risks in cats neutered early-If you have a young, active cat who has suddenly gained weight following a neuter, whose growth plates aren’t closed, there is a possibility their bones aren’t going to be as strong as their intact male counterpart.

What are the benefits of spaying/neutering?

Removal of the female reproductive organs prevents pyometra, a uterine infection that can be life threatening. It also prevents uterine, ovarian, and vaginal tumor formation. Mammary tumors (breast cancer) in female dogs is substantially increased with age and exposure to sex hormones. One study suggests the risk is up to 40% higher in intact females after 2.5 years of age.

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Intact male dogs over 5 years of age will have a 50% chance of developing benign prostatic hyperplasia, a very painful condition where the prostate gland becomes enlarged, pressing on the colon and making them unable to defecate without pain. Castration prevents this, as well as prostatitis, prostatic cysts, testicular cancer, and perineal herniation.

Studies have shown that intact male cats exhibit less affection towards humans and more aggression towards other cats.

Intact dogs and cats are more likely to die of infections and trauma. Spayed/neutered dogs and cats have been shown to live longer. Pets having surgery at younger ages appear to heal from it faster—there is less blood flow to the sex organs if they haven’t been used yet, and less abdominal and intra-abdominal fat obscuring the surgical field.

As some animals become more sexually mature, undesirable behaviors can develop, such as mounting, being overly protective/bonded to one owner in the home, urinary marking or spraying, and aggression towards other animals. This can create a stressful situation for other animals in the household, as well as their owners.

What are the recommendations at Viking Veterinary Care?

In general, if you are not breeding your dog, we recommend the following:

Female dogs: Spaying before their first heat cycle (unless they appear to have a tucked vulva- Please consult your veterinarian on this!). This is around 6 months of age for most females, possibly later for giant breeds.

Male dogs: Neuter at musculoskeletal maturity. In small dogs, this is around 6 months of age. In large or giant breeds, we recommend 1 to 1.5 years of age unless behavior issues are involved.

Male and female cats: Neuter and spay between 4-5 months of age. Some cats will become sexually active before 6 months-old, and it may be a benefit to spay/neuter before urine marking develops.

If you have questions about your specific pet, please discuss them with Dr. Gilbert and Dr. Brock directly. These are general guidelines and may not be applicable in all cases.

References:
Bushby, Phillip. Pediatric spay and neuter. Wild West Conference 2015
Little, Susan. The best time to neuter kittens. International Society of Feline Medicine 2013

Warning: Please do not share your turkey skin, bones, drippings, etc. with your pets this holiday season. It really upsets us!

Thank you in advance,
Your pet’s pancreas and gastrointestinal tract
Our online pharmacy is coming next month!

Soon you will be able to order medications and prescription foods and have them shipped straight to your home! These products are coming directly from our distributors, so they will be guaranteed by the manufacturer (not the case with most online pharmacies!).

Shipping will be free for orders over $49. Stay tuned for more details in next month’s newsletter!

Sam & Dean

I don't know how it’s possible, but Sam and Dean are still available in our adoption ward! They keep each other company but are very lovey with humans too - what a perfect combination!

Sam and Dean are available for adoption through Northwest Animal Companions Oregon as a pair for $200. They have already been fully vaccinated, neutered, microchipped, and are almost 6 months old. Please call us to schedule a meet and greet or to ask any questions about these "Supurrrnatural" boys at 971-371-4024.

It is with heavy hearts we say goodbye to our head CVT, Lisa Nicholson. Her determination to bring quality medical and behavioral care to our patients was clearly evident.

Farewell to one great employee and an even better friend. Your hard work and dedication were an important part of our team. As you turn the page in your life's story, we join together in wishing you every success in all your future endeavors.
**November 2016 Newsletter**

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