



## Neutering Your Dog or Bitch

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Over the last few months there has been a lot of discussion on Social Media sites concerning the best age to spay your bitch or castrate your dog (collectively known as neutering). It is clear from the discussion that there are varying thoughts on the best age and for those new to owning a puppy it could be quite confusing. We therefore felt that it would be a good idea to put together the following document which we hope will help you come to an informed decision.

### What is neutering?

Neutering is surgically removing the reproductive organs in males and females to prevent pets from reproducing.

With castration both testicles are removed which takes away the main source of the male hormone testosterone. With spaying, both the ovaries and the uterus are removed which means the female is unable to become pregnant

### Why Neuter?

The reason most people decide to have their dog neutered is to prevent unwanted puppies from female dogs, to correct unwanted behaviour in males, which comes with puberty or some, following advice from vets, have the procedure carried out for health reasons. Whatever the reason is, there are pros and cons to consider.

Before going any further, we should look at puberty and the role hormones play in the growth of your puppy.

### Puberty

Puppies normally reach puberty any time from six months old and their elevated hormone levels can adversely affect their behaviour. This behaviour will not 'automatically' be resolved by neutering despite advice you may receive to the contrary. Try not to worry - it soon passes!

Bitches are normally 'in season' for three weeks (and are fertile during this time) so they should not be taken outside (other than the garden) or allowed to mix with male dogs.

As male dogs reach puberty they start cocking their legs, and you may observe an increased interest in other dogs, independence, mounting behaviour and 'macho' behaviour with dogs and/or people.



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## Growth

From the moment your puppy is born it goes through a lot of growing and bones are very vulnerable to stress fractures and injuries. A puppy's hormones play an important part in its growth and the strength of the bones.

### What Hormones are Affected:

All mammals are born with various hormones. Three of the most important ones are Oestrogen, Progesterone, and Testosterone. All dogs, males and females, have these hormones and are commonly called sex hormones and are related to reproduction. However, they also play a very important role in other aspects of the animal's well-being. They allow and create physical, social, and behavioural maturity.

Without these hormones the dogs, if immature when the operation is carried out, may not behaviourally and physically reach full maturity.

Both physiological and psychological problems can and do occur because of these early invasive operations

Removing or reducing these hormones could have a profound effect.

This is an extract from the [Angry Vets](#): *Spaying and neutering not only potentially shortens the lifespan but also has been correlated with various illnesses. Obesity (sometimes not even responsive to extreme calorie restriction), osteoarthritis, Anterior Cruciate Rupture, diabetes, hypothyroidism, prostatic cancer, hemangiosarcoma, osteosarcoma, urinary incontinence, urinary tract infection and juvenile vulva.*

These are just a few conditions that are overly represented in spayed and neutered pets.

The following x-rays show how much growing a puppy's bones has to do until they are fully matured.



Two-week old Puppy



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X-ray of 4-month-old puppy - growth plates are still open.



X-ray of a 10-month old Puppy, - growth plates almost closed.



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X-ray picture of an adult dog – growth plates fully closed.

## Pros and Cons of Neutering

As you can imagine the neutering of a dog or bitch is quite an emotive subject and in the end, it is an individual's choice (after discussion with your vet), as to when to have this procedure carried out.

We give below the pros and cons for neutering your bitch dog which has some health and behaviour benefits and some downsides too.

### Neutering a Bitch

#### PROS

- ensures no phantom pregnancies
- ensures no womb infections (pyometra)
- ensures no ovarian tumours
- ensures no unwanted pregnancies

#### CONS

- can increase the risk of urinary incontinence in older bitches
- does affect growth rate
- does affect maturity
- could affect bone density if carried out at an early age.
- increases the likelihood that your dog will get fat later in life (unless you control its diet strictly and exercise it regularly)
- could affect the growth and texture of your dog's coat



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## Neutering of Male Dogs

### PROS

- removes the risk of prostate problems
- removes risk of testicular cancer
- can reduce aggressiveness

### CONS

- may not reliably reduce aggression
- may not reduce dominant behaviour
- does affect growth rate
- does affect maturity
- could affect bone density if carried out at an early age
- increases the likelihood that your dog will get fat later in life (unless you control its diet strictly and exercise it regularly)
- could affect the growth and texture of your dog's coat

## Is neutering right for me?

Neutering is only something that you can decide after careful consideration and in consultation with your vet. The above has been provided to help you come to an informed decision but is only a snapshot of all the information available online. Therefore, it is imperative you do your homework and research before taking matters further.

Remember this type of surgery cannot be reversed in the future, therefore you need to be absolutely certain you are doing it for the right reason before proceeding.

Sources: The Kennel Club  
Animal Health  
Blue Cross  
Dog Listener  
[Angry Vets:](#)