



## North Seattle Veterinary Clinic

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# Canine spay and neuter recommendations

There is a lot of conflicting information about whether and when to spay or neuter a dog. This is a personal decision based not only on medical recommendations but also on lifestyle and dog behaviors. Sexual maturity occurs generally around 7-9 months of age. Some dogs exhibit behavior changes at this stage, including increased urine marking and possible increased aggression with other dogs. Training can become more difficult after this stage. Female dogs that have not been spayed generally have their first heat cycle at this time, and can become pregnant. Dogs typically have heat cycles again every 6 months afterward (or a little longer for large breed dogs). Menstrual bleeding generally lasts 1-2 weeks. Unspayed middle-aged and senior female dogs have a high risk of developing an infection within the uterus, requiring emergency treatment including emergency surgery.

### Procedure for spaying a female dog (ovariohysterectomy)

This procedure includes surgically removing the ovaries and uterus through an incision in the middle of the belly. Dogs that have been spayed will not have a heat cycle, will not menstruate and cannot become pregnant. After surgery the dog is sent home with an E-collar and pain medication. The dog generally feels better within about 2-3 days, but the client will be asked to restrict the dog's activity for about a week.

Spay surgery for more mature (over 9 months of age), large breed dogs can take longer, and can have a slightly higher complication rate than if spayed at a younger age. It is recommended to wait about 8 weeks after a heat cycle or pregnancy before spaying a dog.

### Procedure for neutering a male dog (castration)

This procedure involves making an incision between the sheath and the scrotum and surgically removing the testicles. After surgery the dog is sent home with an E-collar and pain medication. The dog generally feels better within about 24 hours, but the client will be asked to restrict the dog's activity for about a week.

### What are the medical recommendations?

There have been recent studies to review whether spay or neuter surgery timing affects overall health of the pet long term. The general result is that for some large-breed dogs there may be some increased risks in some health complications (such as some orthopedic issues and possibly some types of cancers) if spay or neuter occurs before 12-18 months of age. For small or medium-sized dogs there appears to be no change in risks based on age, so it is recommended to spay or neuter at around 6 months old. Also, many small-breed dogs have a problem with not losing their baby teeth appropriately, which can cause a problem with the adult teeth. When the dog is under anesthesia for the surgery the remaining baby teeth can be extracted.

### NSVC recommendations

You decide what is right for your family. You are the one who has to maintain diapers on a female dog during her heat cycle, or who has to continue to leash train a dog who may be becoming large and exhibiting difficult behaviors after puberty. We want you to have the best relationship possible with your dog, and if these changes may affect that relationship then spaying or neutering may be a good choice no matter what breed of dog. The veterinarians at NSVC recommend spaying and neutering most dogs at about 6 months of age.