

## The Bitch Spay

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As spay week Ireland approaches (22nd May to 29<sup>th</sup> May) we take a look at the key benefits of spaying and the procedure itself. Spaying is the more commonly used term for Ovariohysterectomy, which basically means the removal of the uterus and ovaries. The operation is a one off procedure and is not reversible.

As responsible pet owners, we can all do our bit for the health and welfare of our animals. Spaying a dog at an early age can lengthen her life span and increase her quality of life. Generally, routine spaying is performed at six months of age, but this may vary from practice to practice, based on individual cases. Ovariohysterectomy can also be performed post-whelping when puppies have been weaned and the mammary glands have returned to normal.

### Key Benefits for Ovariohysterectomy in the bitch:

**Heat Prevention:** -To prevent oestrus and the associated problems such as bloody vaginal discharge, the nuisance of male dogs being attracted and unwanted pregnancies.

**Mammary Tumour Reduction:** - Spaying at a early age reduces the risk and severity of mammary cancers. It is important to be aware that 50% of mammary tumours are malignant in the entire (un-neutered) bitch.

**Pyometra Prevention:** - Pyometra is an infection whereby the uterus fills with pus and the dog's condition deteriorates rapidly. It is a very serious condition, more commonly seen in the middle-aged and elderly bitch. Spaying is indicated as the treatment or prevention, prevention is best.

**Phantom Pregnancy Prevention:** - Spaying is also indicated as a permanent treatment for recurrent and severe false pregnancy, phantom pregnancy or pseudocyesis. Phantom pregnancy may cause behavioural changes (for e.g. depression, nest making) as well as physical changes (lactation, abdominal enlargement).

### Ovariohysterectomy Procedure

As a bitch spay is a major surgical procedure, it requires general anaesthesia, full theatre discipline and surgical technique. The uterus is an organ which comprises of a uterine body, two horns (to which the ovaries are attached) and a cervix. Strictly speaking the spaying of an animal means the removal of the ovaries (ovariectomy). When both ovaries and the uterus to the level of the cervix are removed this operation is known as an Ovariohysterectomy.

An incision is made on the midline of the abdominal wall at the level of the umbilicus. The incision is made through three layers to expose the abdominal contents (skin fascia- outer skin, linea alba-outer layer of muscle under the skin and peritoneum- inner muscle layer). The uterus and ovaries are carefully located, surgically removed and ligated (tied off). At the end of surgery the abdominal incision is stitched up routinely in three layers. The outer layer of stitches on the skin fascia, if non -absorbable material is used, should be removed 10 days post surgery.

Immediate post -operative treatment generally includes pain relief, exercise restriction recovery diet and plenty of TLC. An Elizabethan collar is often given to prevent the dog from licking at the

wound. Long term dietary modifications are often indicated to prevent obesity, which often occurs after spaying due to alteration in hormone levels.

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