

To spay or not to spay

Very often, pet parents are unaware of the existence, let alone the necessity of the act of spaying in females and neutering in males. Dr Sangeeta Vengsarkar throws light on the former and presents a choice to an owner to either spay their she-dogs or not. Read on and make the decision

“Doctor, give me a morning appointment,” the young man said urgently. “My pup is bleeding and I want to bring him as soon as possible.” “How old is he?” I asked. “He is a six-month old Pomeranian,” he said. “Okay, bring him in right away,” I said, and hung up. Mr. Young Man came half an hour later, with a perky looking Pom. I took the patient on the table, and did a cursory examination. I smiled. “I have news for you. ‘He’ is a she, and she is on heat.” “What?!” He said, looking shocked. “But...I always thought....my friend gave it to me a month back and I always presumed...” “That’s the problem when you address dogs as ‘it’.” I chided. “But anyway, at least you don’t have to change her name, from Snowy.”

“Okay, Doctor, now what?” he said, looking bewildered and embarrassed.

“I never thought about the fact that bitches get their menses too.” Yes, they’re called oestrus cycles,” I said, trying to educate him, “and they occur every 6-8 months. They normally last for 2-3 weeks, but the first 2 heat periods may be silent or irregular. The start of the cycle is marked by a bloody discharge which lasts for a week. A few days before this, the vulva appears swollen. This discharge turns sticky and straw-coloured after about a week. It is only for 4-5 days at this stage i.e. from the 8th to 12th day from the beginning of heat, that the female will allow a male to mate with her.”

“I don’t think I will be able to handle all this,” said Mr. Young, “Can’t we sterilise her?” “Yes, spaying is an option you can think about if you don’t want her to breed and have puppies. This involves the removal of the ovaries, uterus and cervix. This will do away with her 3-week season. Ideally, spaying should be done before the first heat to reduce the risk of mammary cancer, but it’s still a good time before 2 years of age to reduce the incidence of mammary tumours. Even after this age, spaying will avoid the risk of uterine disease (pyometra) and ovarian tumours. Also, on an average, spayed bitches live longer and healthier lives.”

“What are the psychological effects?” he asked. “Spaying makes females more contented and affectionate. For them, since mating is purely a hormonal act which happens only during those 4-5 days, there are no psychological side effects.”

“What are the disadvantages?” “Once spayed, a female can never give birth, since the surgery is irreversible. They also tend to put on weight, so you’ll have to watch her diet. And about 5% of females get a urinary incontinence which can be treated with hormone pills.”

“What about the surgery?” “Surgery is done under general anaesthetic, and takes about an hour. Healing after surgery takes about a week for young females. So, young man, think about all this. To spay or not to spay. The choice is yours.”