

Dog Sterilization And Why We Should Be Doing It To Our Dogs



We have all heard of pets being sterilized and know it stops them breeding, but what do vets actually do to achieve this? In the females, the ovaries, uterine horns and uterine body up to the cervix are removed entirely. In the male, the testicle and some of the spermatic cord are removed. In both cases, the tissues that produce reproductive hormones as well as the eggs and sperm are removed, preventing further reproductive activity and reproductive hormone production. Surgical sterilization is currently the only method of permanent sterilisation available in South Africa.

Now that we understand what is done, we should consider why do it at all?

The first and most important reason is obviously **population control**. Remember that organizations like Wetnose, SPCA and other rescue organizations only exist because there is a need for them, which means there are already many more animals needing a home than there are good homes for them. If we consider that these rescue organizations are all overflowing most of the time, we have to admit dogs genuinely are being over-bred.

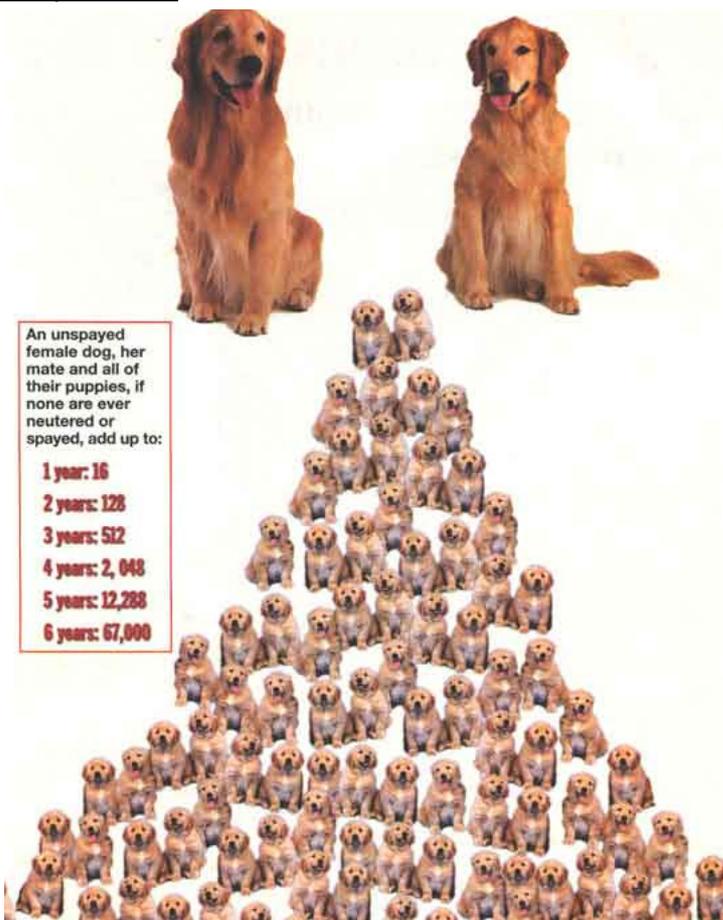
The benefits of sterilization of pets revolve around the elimination of the effect of **reproductive hormones** on the body and behaviour.

Without the hormonal urge to look for a mate, both male and female dogs are less likely to wander, and thus less likely to be involved in car accidents, fights with other dogs out of their homes, trauma from fences or walls or to go missing. Females on heat will attract intact males to and into the property they live on, meaning they need to be closed up for the heat period. The "in season" vaginal bleed that the females go through is also a major **nuisance**, especially for indoor dogs.

If the procedure is performed before the dog is sexually mature, dogs will have less need to mark territories with urine, mount other dogs (though this is partly just a behavioural mannerism) and will prevent your male dogs going nuts and barking all day and night when there is a female on heat anywhere in the vicinity.

Apart from those significant effects, there are also notable **physical benefits** to sterilization. In females, sterilization eliminates the possibility of ovarian or uterine cancers, and massively reduces the incidence of mammary tumours (basically breast cancer), which is one of the most common tumours seen in female dogs. Dogs sterilised before their first heat will have less chance of mammary cancer than dogs sterilised after the first heat, and the chance of this cancer is greater with each heat cycle the female experiences. Another severe and life threatening ailment which sterilization will prevent is pyometra, a uterine infection. This is relatively common mainly among the older intact females and is costly to treat. In males, sterilization will decrease benign prostatic hyperplasia, perianal adenocarcinoma and eliminate the chance of testicular cancer.

Overall, after reading about how sterilization will benefit your pet, you can also understand why studies have shown that sterilized pets **live significantly longer** than their intact counterparts.



What will change in my dog once he or she is sterilised?

Now, one must always consider both sides of the coin. One of the first negatives often cited when sterilization is brought up is that someone they know had a dog who gained weight after the procedure and never lost it. Now, we all know hormones play a role in metabolism, and that every individual's body differs. In many cases the pet has the kind of body that tends to gain weight already and the hormone alteration accelerates it. This is easy to negate, as it is a simple matter of **changing the diet to prevent weight gain** in the first place in those animals who tend to be on the chubby side before the procedure.



Another common complaint is that the dogs personality will change and that the dog will not protect the family or property anymore. Studies have shown that there is the chance that some dogs will have lower energy levels, due to the change in hormone levels and metabolism, and that some female dogs may be more assertive with their owners or new people. In terms of intact males wanting to fight, the hormonal drive to be the dominant breeding male is removed with sterilisation, but the actual level of aggression is unchanged, which means they will be just as aggressive if they do fight, but they are **less likely to fight** overall. Further than this there have been no proven behavioural changes after sterilisation, and dogs that were **good guard dogs and protectors** remain so.



There are less common side effects that occur after sterilisation, many of which are related to weight gain that has not been managed or curbed .e.g. diabetes mellitus and cruciate ligament rupture. Please note again that if the weight gain is managed, then these need not be risks. There are other less common sequels to sterilization, which can be discussed with your veterinarian before deciding on sterilisation, but sterilisation and the risks that are avoided by doing so still outweigh the potential limited and manageable side effects.

One last benefit of sterilisation is the amount of **money and stress you may save** by doing so. In males, prostatic hyperplasia and cysts because of hormonal activity can block your dog's urethra and mean he must be hospitalised and have emergency sterilisation so he can urinate again. In females, it is relatively common that a female dog will not manage to give birth normally or to only some of the pups and will then need an emergency caesarean section, which will cost you 4-6x the cost of the normal sterilisation. The puppies will need feeding until they can be homed, and if the mom refuses to feed them then they must be hand reared. If a female dog develops a pyometra, it is often critical by the time she shows she is ill and needs emergency surgery. Overall, the **consequences of not spaying or sterilising are often life threatening and costly**, and can all be **easily avoided**.

If you have any questions or would like to know more, contact your veterinarian, and try and help to educate other owners and save many beautiful lives!

