

When to Spay or Neuter Your Large Breed Dog

Sylvan Lake Veterinary Clinic

Recent studies have shown that spaying and neutering large breed dogs at an older age may decrease the risk of joint disease. Spaying or neutering dogs after they are sexually mature comes with greater responsibility to prevent roaming. Male dogs can detect females in heat from over a kilometre away and will make great efforts to get out of their yard.

Historically we have recommended spaying and neutering at 6 months of age. We recommend spaying or neutering because these pets will live longer. A recent study that looked at over 70,000 dogs showed that if they were spayed or neutered they lived 2 years longer than intact dogs. Spaying or neutering dogs at a younger age also may decrease some unwanted behaviours like defending their territory(your house) or roaming. Pets who were not spayed or neutered were more likely to die from trauma or infectious disease. After a strong push for spaying and neutering in the US in the 1980's the number of pets euthanized at shelters decreased from 17 million to 3 million per year

There are two studies published and one for which the data has been released and they correlate very well. The studies looked at German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers and the relationship between age of spay or neuter and the number of dogs affected by joint disease(crutiate rupture, and hip and elbow dysplasia). The studies showed that dogs spayed and neutered before 6 months of age were much more likely to develop joint disease. Dogs spayed or neutered between 6-11 months were more likely to develop joint disease. After one year of age the level of joint disease seems to be the same as if they were not spayed or neutered.

With this information we feel that large breed dog owners should consider delaying spaying or neutering their dogs until after 1 year of age. With this owners are going to have to be prepared to deal with females going into heat and keeping intact males from roaming. If this is something that owners are unable to deal with then feel free to discuss your situation with one of our health care team members. Research is ongoing with respect to this and in the next year we should have more firm recommendations.

Reference: VIN/VSPN Rounds: The Impact of Spay/Neuter on Joint Disorders and Cancers in Dogs(transcript).