

Chop and change?

A common question that arises in the consulting room is whether to neuter a male dog or not. What are the benefits and are there any disadvantages? Well the latter takes me back to when I first qualified as a Veterinary Surgeon, several decades ago, and I was working in a farm animal practice in Devon. I was told by my boss to visit a farm and neuter (castrate) 30 calves. On arriving at the farm I found the calves were quite big, 4 month old bullocks, and they were charging around their pen looking very uncooperative about what was to follow. I checked their age with the farmer and, as they were over 3 months old, explained, that under the new welfare regulations, they would all have to be injected with local anaesthetic first.

After a huge struggle I managed to inject them all and went on and performed the castration, carefully putting the testicles to one side. I went to dispose of them afterwards but the farmer told me to 'leave them be' and he would get rid of them. I headed back to the practice to report on a successful outcome.

However the following lunchtime the senior partner had a very irate farmer on the phone complaining about the new Vet! He had just woken up with a terrible hangover after falling asleep after lunch the previous day. Apparently he had fried up the calves testicles with some onions for lunch and had eaten the lot. All the local anaesthetic had taken its toll and sent him to sleep for 24 hours. It was only natural that the new Vet should get the blame!

Of course that was an unusual occurrence and let us get back to the original topic of whether to neuter a male dog. There are several advantages to doing this as follows;

- ┌ It will make him more sociable as a pet; less likely to urinate in the house (marking territory) and less likely to mount the vicars' leg when he calls in for tea.
- ┌ He will be easier to control as he will not need to chase off after female dogs so less likely to get lost or get involved in an accident.
- ┌ He cannot cause an unwanted pregnancy!

- ┌ He will be less likely to get prostate disease when he gets older.
- ┌ He will be less likely to get certain cancers when he gets older.

One has to balance this by saying that there are also some minor disadvantages. The dog will put on weight more easily and may get changes in its coat. However his temperament may not change and it is certainly not a definite way of calming an over boisterous dog down, or curing aggression, although it may in some cases cause an improvement in these matters.

Overall there are more pluses than minuses but each case is different and I recommend you discuss this with your own Veterinary Surgeon. In most cases it is best to carry out the operation while the dog is still young to maximise the benefits to it.

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