

As poor Beth staggered into my consulting room one summers' day the rancid odour immediately led me to suspect a problem. She was dripping fluid from her abdomen so it was easy to find the source of the offensive smell. I gently turned her on her side and was greeted by the horrific site of an ulcerating mammary tumour. This is equivalent to breast cancer in a human and can vary in how malignant it can be. In this case the owner had not immediately noticed the problem so the tumour had grown through the skin and, to make matters worse, flies had laid eggs on it. These had hatched, so now live maggots were eating away at Beth's flesh.

These cancers are not as common as they once were which is entirely due to the earlier neutering of female dogs. If a female dog (bitch) is neutered (spayed) before it has a season it virtually eliminates the risk of them developing these tumours later in life. If they have one season the risk is still much reduced, although once they have had over 4 seasons the benefit of spaying, at least with regard to preventing mammary tumours, is minimal.

Spaying your bitch also has other benefits. It obviously prevents them getting pregnant and prevents, of course, the unwanted attention of many of the male dogs in the area. It also prevents them getting hormonal problems such as false pregnancies and abnormal conditions of the uterus (womb) later in life.

In Beth's case she had to endure a painful illness and several operations before she recovered. She was lucky; not all dogs survive this cancer. So don't let your dog end up like Beth; do what you can to prevent these tumours. If you are getting, or have, a young bitch, think about getting it spayed while it is still young. Your Veterinary Surgeon can advise you further.

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