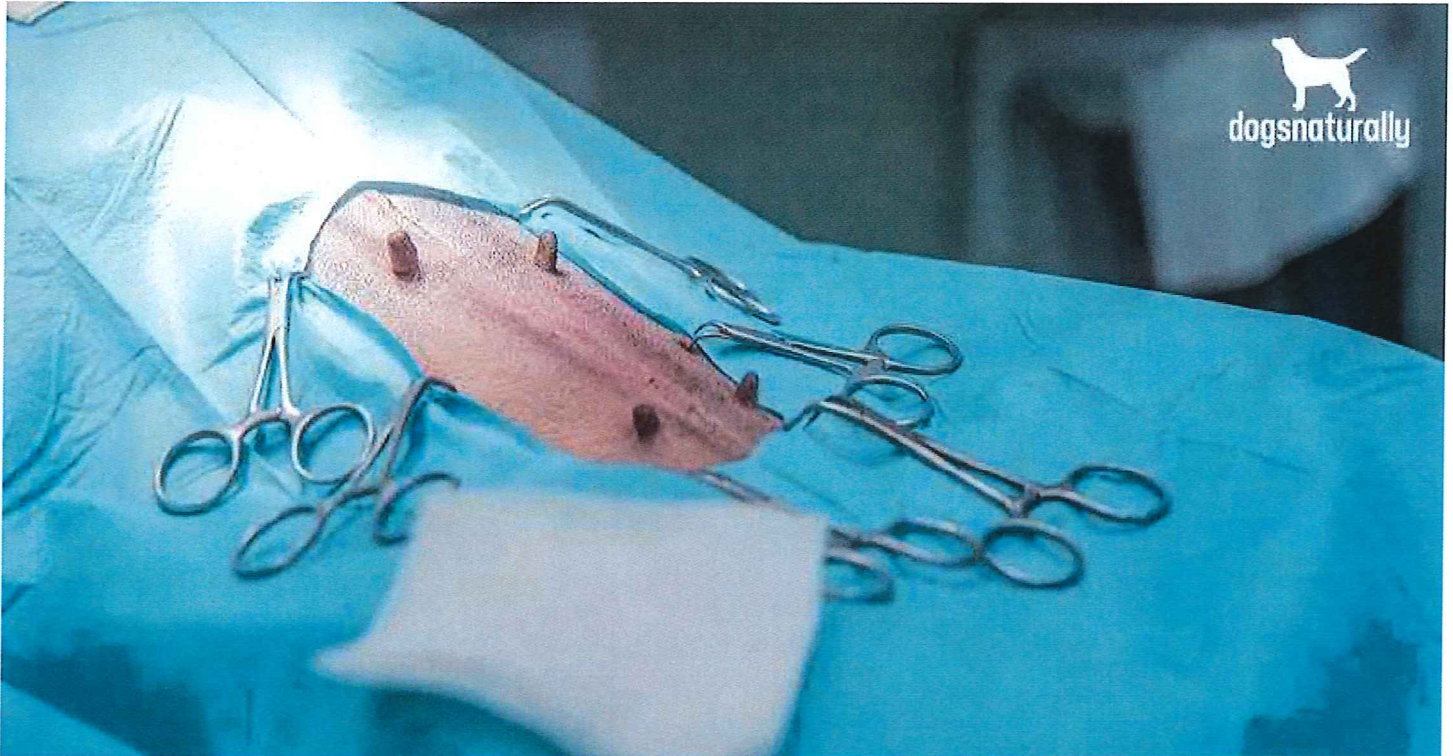


Early Spay Neuter: 3 Reasons To Reconsider




By: Dana Scott - Reading Time: 6 minutes

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The topic of spay/neuter is emotionally charged for many pet owners.

It's become the "responsible" thing to do. We commonly hear of the benefits of this surgery ... but rarely the risks.

And when savvy pet owners avoid early spay/neuter (or forgo it altogether) to mitigate that risk ... they're often vilified for contributing to the pet over-population problem.

But decisions made on emotion aren't usually the best decisions we can make.

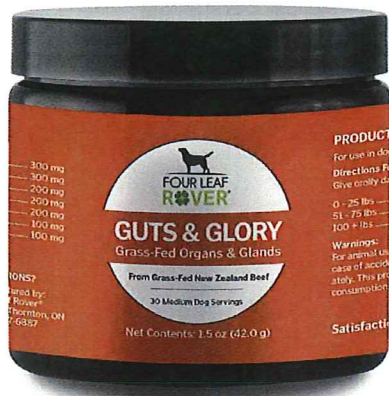
So indulge me while I take an objective and scientific look at what's causing all the fuss.

We'll start with the most recent reason to reconsider spay/neuter ...

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In February 2014, a study was completed on over 2500 Vizsla dogs and the results were a blow to those who vehemently defend spay/neuter.

But this latest study is just the most recent of a long line of work showing that **removing a quarter of the dog's endocrine system might not be in the dog's best interests** – and maybe not even in the best interests of rescues and shelters.

Let's look at what this research shows as the three most important reasons you should reconsider spay/neuter.

1. Spay/Neuter And Joint Disease

We'll get to the Vizsla study that I mentioned later. They didn't investigate the link between spay/neuter and joint disease ... but they didn't really need to.

There was already plenty of research showing the link.

Hip Dysplasia

A 2013 study on Golden Retrievers found that male dogs who were neutered before 12

months of age had double the risk of hip dysplasia than their intact counterparts

Other research shows that dogs sterilized before the age of six months have a 70% increased risk of developing hip dysplasia. The authors of this study propose that ...

"...it is possible that the increase in bone length that results from early-age gonadectomy results in changes in joint conformation, which could lead to a diagnosis of hip dysplasia."

There's even more evidence that spay/neuter can increase the risk of hip dysplasia.

- In a 2005 study, Van Hagen et al found that of the sample dogs diagnosed with hip dysplasia, those that were neutered six months prior to the diagnosis were **nearly twice as likely** to develop hip dysplasia.
- A study by Dannuccia et al (Calcif Tissue Int, 1986), found that removing the ovaries of Beagles caused increased remodeling of the pelvic bone. This also suggests an increased risk of hip dysplasia with spay.

Cruciate Ligament Tears

Cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears have also been linked to spay/neuter in numerous studies.

The Golden Retriever study found that although there were **no cases of cruciate tear in the intact dogs**, 5% of males neutered before 12 months and 8% of females did suffer tears.

Whitehair et al (JAVMA Oct 1993), found that spayed and neutered dogs of any age were twice as likely to suffer cranial cruciate ligament rupture. In 2004, Slauterbeck et al also found an increased risk of cruciate tears.

Chris Zinc DVM PhD DACVP explains,

"...if the femur has achieved its genetically determined normal length at eight months when a dog gets spayed or neutered, but the tibia, which normally stops growing at 12 to 14 months of age continues to grow, then an abnormal angle may develop at the stifle. In addition, with the extra growth, the lower leg below the stifle likely becomes heavier (because it is longer)

the extra growth, the lower leg below the stifle likely becomes heavier (because it is longer), and may cause increased stresses on the cranial cruciate ligament."

Additionally, sterilization can cause obesity and a loss of bone mass (Martin et al, Bone 1987).

Both of these factors could lead to an increased risk of cranial cruciate ligament tear and hip dysplasia.

And a 2005 Austrian study showed that spayed/neutered dogs are over three times more likely to suffer from patellar luxation

Check out how turmeric can be helpful for joint pain. [Click here!](#)

But there are even more sinister issues with spay/neuter.

2. Spay/Neuter And Cancer

Contrary to popular belief, we can't spay/neuter cancer.

In fact, this surgery mostly **increases the risk of many common canine cancers.**

Males vs Females

The Golden Retriever study found that the incidence of lymphosarcoma was **three times higher** in males neutered before 12 months of age.

The percentage of hemangiosarcoma in **females spayed after 12 months was four times higher** than that of intact and even early-spayed females.

And 6% of females spayed after 12 months were affected with mast cell cancer, while there were **zero cases among the intact females.**

These results are similar to other studies.

The more recent (2014) Vizsla study found that spayed females had significantly higher rates of hemangiosarcoma (nine times higher) than intact females.

They also found that spayed/neutered dogs were 3.5% more likely to suffer mast cell cancer

and 4.3 times more likely to suffer lymphoma.

Spayed vs Intact

The incidence of **all cancers** in spayed females was **6.5 times higher** and in neutered **males was 3.6 times higher** than intact dogs.

Young Dogs

They also found that **the younger the dogs were spayed/neutered, the younger they were when diagnosed with cancer.**

in 2009, [Waters et al](#) found similar results in their study of female Rottweilers. The researchers set out to determine whether retaining the ovaries contributed to longevity.

In Rottweilers, the major causes of death are **sarcoma and other cancers, which account for 38% and 73% of deaths** respectively.

After excluding all cancer deaths, females who kept their ovaries until 7 years of age were more than 9 times more likely to reach exceptional longevity than females with the shortest ovary exposure.

Although intact female dogs were more likely than males to achieve exceptional longevity, that advantage was erased with spay.

3. Spay/Neuter And Behavior

Spay/neuter had been previously linked to cognitive impairment and even a three-fold risk of hypothyroidism (which often creates behavior changes). But the [Viszla study](#) yielded some particularly interesting insight into this link.

Spayed and neutered dogs were also more likely to develop behavior disorders than intact dogs.

This included:

- Fear of storms
- Fear of noises
- Excitability
- Hyperactivity
- Separation anxiety
- Timidity
- Aggression
- Fear biting

Another study in 2010 found neutered dogs were more:

- Aggressive
- Fearful
- Excitable
- Less trainable than intact dogs

This is **contrary to the popular belief that neutering reduces aggression** and other behavior problems.

There's Nothing Routine About Spay/Neuter

These findings also present a conundrum for shelters and rescues who advocate spay/neuter.

Reducing the number of dogs in shelters is an important goal ... but it would be much better to prevent them from ending up at the shelter in the first place.

Most people believe that shelters are full because of over-population.

But in fact, **behavior problems are the most common reason owners give up their dogs.**

And is it fair for shelters to burden adopters with the increased risk of cancer and joint disease?

There are alternatives to the complete removal of the reproductive organs and this might play a role in reducing the risk of cancer, joint disease and behavior issues.

Spay is *instant menopause*. It immediately shuts off the supply of protective hormones that

are involved in much more than just reproduction.

Modified spay/neuter surgeries have less impact on the hormones and endocrine system. So dogs enjoy more hormone protection, even when sterilized.

Hormones produced by the reproductive organs are essential for reproduction ... but they're also vital in developing ...

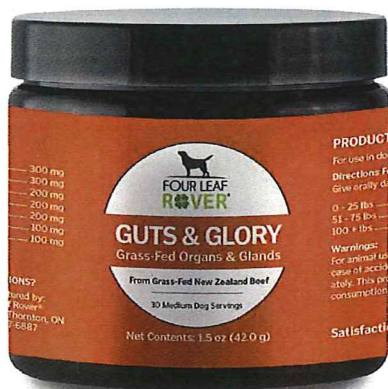
- Homeostasis
- Cholesterol levels
- Urinary continence
- Cognition
- They play a role in the immune system
- Body condition
- Energy levels
- Muscle tone
- Behavior

The rise in the risk of many cancers after removal of the reproductive organs is evidence of this.

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Other Options

In females, a partial spay, or ovary-sparing spay or tubal ligation are safer options.

In males, vasectomy can also be a safer option. There is also a zinc injection that has recently come into favor. Hopefully this research will encourage more shelters to look into

these safer and less intrusive options.

Search this directory to find a veterinarian offering hormone-sparing spay or neuter procedures.

Finally, if your goal is to give your dog the best chance at a life free of joint disease, cancer and behavior issues, then keeping your dog intact is certainly an option.

If you're thoughtful and caring enough to get this far in the article, you're certainly thoughtful enough to manage an intact dog.

Simply make certain that ...

- Your intact male isn't allowed to wander
- You keep your intact female on leash for a few weeks when she is in estrus

Removing a significant part of your dog's endocrine system should be anything but routine.

As research continues to show the damning results of spay/neuter, it's certainly in your dog's best interests for you to consider these three important reasons to keep your best friend just the way mother nature made him.