

Spaying of Bitches
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SPAYING OF BITCHES (OVAROHYSTERECTOMY)

The general culture in the UK is that bitches should be spayed, if not to be used for breeding. This is a thorny issue for many bitch owners. It helps to be objective, when trying to arrive at a decision.

There are issues about which everyone should be aware, before deciding. Most bitches reach puberty at about six months of age (range 5-18 months). They follow a five- to eight-monthly cycle from then, some slowing down or stopping when aged. The bleeding, at the start of a 'season', stopping just before ovulation, is from the lining of the vagina (and bears **no relation** to the human's bleeding, during monthly cycles). Whether mated or not, the 'season' will cease soon after this and the bitch then goes into pregnancy, if successfully mated, or 'pseudo-pregnancy' if not. This latter lasts for a full nine weeks, as in a normal pregnancy, whether it is noticeable or not. There is then a 'nesting and nursing' phase, which again may or may not show.

Disadvantages of not spaying are these. There can be heavy blood spots, during the early season. The bitch may become quite wayward, sometimes seeking a mate, near to ovulation time. She may be moody, clingy or morose, during her pseudo-pregnant phase. She may become obsessed with nest-making (sometimes leading to holes in the garden or in the back of a favourite sofa!) or obsessed with a 'surrogate puppy' ('nursing' it, carrying it about, rushing back to the nest) during the false nursing phase. She may produce milk. She may, of course, fall pregnant, if she were to meet a dog at the right time. This can be a tragedy if the dog is of too large a type or if unwanted puppies result. Some bitches will produce mammary tumours (usually benign), which grow further at each 'season'. This is, happily, quite rare. The disease pyometra cannot happen in a spayed bitch but it is not common in entire bitches, especially under natural [holistic feeding](#) and management.

A collateral challenge may be the behaviour of dogs in the vicinity, during her season. This can result in damage to property, in a dog's attempt to get to her or

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may cause health problems to the dog himself or may give rise to dangers on the road.

Disadvantages of spaying (apart from surgical risks) are less often discussed. They result from hormone imbalances and structural changes, as a consequence of removal of womb and ovaries. Bitches can suffer weight problems after spaying. This can be dramatic and the body's fat distribution is altered. She may become greedier. The coat, especially in Spaniels and Setters; can change colour, become wispy and profuse. The downy undercoat can be lost. Bare patches may appear on the flanks. In some spayed bitches, very rarely, I have seen disastrous 'false pregnancies', with massive milk production, each six months. A common 'side-effect', which can come as a nasty surprise, is urinary incontinence, which may be slight or extreme. It may vary in intensity, following the 'old' six-monthly pattern and usually occurs during sleep or resting. It results from the hormonal and anatomical effects of the spay operation.

So, to spay or not to spay? If a bitch cannot be controlled, thus risking unwanted pups, the only options are spaying or [heat-suppression](#). I believe the latter is too dangerous to warrant the risk, resulting in increased chances of mammary cancer. The injection can be painful and the hair may change colour, at the injection site. [Birth control injections](#) ('morning afters') are bad for the bitch and cannot be repeated in any one season. They may also prolong the season. The 'mutilation', that spaying represents, is understandably undesirable to many but may be a 'necessary evil', to counteract the unnatural situation of the domestic bitch, away from her ancestral 'pack' context. The operation must be performed at about twelve weeks after a season, away from her times of greatest hormonal activity. Some advocate spaying before puberty but I am unsure of the safety of this. Hormone supplements after spaying are generally not safe.

If a bitch does not suffer with seasons and can be well-controlled, then why spay? The male dog problem may often be well-controlled by the use of chlorophyll tablets, which effectively mask or disguise a bitch's scent. The stated risks of pyometra and mammary neoplasia are not great.

Whether spayed or not, a bitch will be healthier on a fresh and varied diet and will benefit from essential fatty acids, such as in Evening Primrose, Star Flower or Fish Oils. If she suffers the side-effects of spaying, as mentioned above, homeopathy can sometimes help.

See also: [heat suppression & mis-mating](#) article.

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