

Consequences of Spaying or Neutering Your Gundog

By Peter Wax

Principle references:

Chris Zink DVM, Ph.D., DAVP., 2005. Early Spay-Neuter Considerations for the Canine Athlete. <http://www.caninesports.com/SpayNeuter.html>, and Laura J. Sanborn, M.S. May 14, 2007. Long-Term Health Risks and Benefits Associated with Spay/Neuter in Dogs. <http://www.naiaonline.org/pdfs/LongTermHealthEffectsOfSpayNeuterInDogs.pdf>

Contrary to what the your local pound, city animal warden, The Humane Society, PETA, or your non-hunting veterinarian might tell you there is probably never a time that neutering your male gundog is in his best interest and probably never a time when spaying your female before eighteen (18) months of age is in hers, and even then it is a trade off. This is particularly true of a gundog that needs ever ounce of healthy development in order to reach their full potential.

It is actually amazing that these groups have convinced such a large portion of the population that with a flick of a knife a doctor can improve on 200 million years of evolution. As if in that time mother nature hasn't already put in the finest engines, drive trains and additives needed for peak performance and longevity as well as removed all the extraneous equipment.

APPEARANCE: Canines neutered or spayed before puberty have orthopedic abnormality resulting from the body not receiving the signals from the adult sex hormones to stop growing. These dogs can often be identified as taller, more slender, lighter boned, narrower in the chest with elongated narrow skulls - Think Castrato.

OTHOPEIDICS: The abnormalities result in alterations in body shape and dimensions particularly in the lengths of the long bones in comparison to others. Dr. Chris Zink Writes: "For example, if the femur has achieved its genetically determined normal length at 8 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), and may cause increased stresses on the cranial cruciate ligament".

The mature sex hormones are required for achieving peak bone density in an adult dog. The abnormalities in bone lengths and density explain why spayed and neutered dogs have a higher risk of cranial cruciate ligament ruptures and hip dysplasia.

CANCER: Reduced risk of cancer is often sighted as a reason for castration, but in reality the opposite is true. Granted no testicles no testicular cancer, but it really isn't a significant risk in the first place at < 1%. However spaying or neutering increases the risks of splenic hemangiosarcoma by 2.2%, and cardiac hemangiosarcoma by five-fold.

A sad fact is that dogs neutered before a year of age have a significant increased risk of developing osteosarcoma bone cancer (what a great gift). There is also a common belief that removing the testicles will prevent or reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Unfortunately the evidence says neutering actually quadruples the risk.

On the plus side of spaying, mammary cancer in female dogs increases with each heat cycle, so spaying would significantly reduced this risk.

BEHAVIOR: Turns out that spaying and neutering does affect behavior. Studies show that spayed and neutered dogs have higher rates of abnormal sexual behaviors, but more importantly to the hunter a higher risk of noise phobias (think gun shyness) and eating disorders leading to obesity.

The American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation found that in general, spayed and neutered dogs are at greater risk to develop abnormal behaviors. The most common abnormalities in females were fear related and in males aggression.

ADDITIONALLY: Spayed dogs have increased the risk of urinary incontinence, recessed vulva, vaginal dermatitis, doubles the risk of urinary tumors, increases risk of obesity, and increases in infections and adverse reactions to vaccines.

Neutered males have increased risk of urethral sphincter incontinence, double the risk of hypothyroidism, triple the risk of obesity, quadruple the risk of prostate cancer and general increases in infections, adverse reactions to vaccines, and increased risk of geriatric cognitive impairment.

CONCLUSION: In conclusion it is not in a gundog's best interest to have it "fixed" prior to eighteen (18) months of age and after that only the female benefits with a reduction in mammary cancer risk and in the convenience of stopping her heat cycle (Not a small consideration) however even with a female gundog waiting until she is eighteen (18) months allows her to physically develop properly and allows you time to assess her ability.

The argument that the world is exploding with unwanted dogs is not going to be addressed by fixing your French Brittany. French Brittanies as a breed are not part of the problem. The broad sweeping policies of canine sterilization should not be applied. Instead, each dog and every situation should be evaluated and a discrete decision made based on sound science.