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## To neuter your dog or not? New studies change answer for some



Carrissa Currier gives her dog Marlow a break during last May's Furry Scurry in Denver. One of two important new studies on neutering male dogs suggests most dog owners should wait until their dog is a year old.

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Should you neuter your dog, and if so, when?

If you are a bottom-line kind of person, and want your male dog to live as long as possible but don't want to read the rest of the article, the answer is still yes — but wait until he is at least a year old.

If you are breeding or showing your dog, do not neuter him. Breeding and neutering are not used in the same sentence for obvious reasons. If you are showing your dog, you already know that shows like to see dogs with all of their parts. If your dog will be an athlete or a hunting dog, you may also want to consider not neutering your dog.

That's because cancers we once thought were preventable by neutering, such as prostate cancer, are now thought to be increased by neutering. And there is now no doubt that large-breed dogs who are neutered suffer more bone and spleen cancers than those who are not.

It is still a small risk of developing these cancers, but allowing large-breed dogs to keep their testicles lowers the risk by 1 percent — a huge deal to scientists doing the study, but maybe not so relevant for dog owners, because this cancer already has a very low incidence.

Prostate cancer is another issue for dogs. Dogs suffer more prostate cancer than any species on the planet; however, [according to renowned veterinary cancer specialist Dr. Greg Ogilvie](#), prostate tumors are still rare in dogs. And prostate cancer in dogs is not related to testosterone, as it is in humans. So neutering will not prevent it, and one study, done in 2002, showed that it increased it fourfold. My own clinical experience is the same; prostate tumors are rare, but occur mostly in neutered dogs.

There are still positive health benefits to neutering your dog. Neutered dogs suffer fewer prostate enlargement cases and infections, which are very common and can be costly to treat. Neutered dogs are less likely to contract venereal diseases and tumors of the penis related to breeding. They appear to have stronger immunity and catch fewer infectious diseases. They fight less, roam less and get hit by cars less.

Neutering also helps reduce unwanted pet pregnancies. Over 3 million dogs and cats are killed each year in shelters. And the No. 1 one cause of death in young dogs is euthanasia because of behavioral issues. For both of these reasons, neutering saves lives.

Probably the biggest reason your veterinarian will recommend neutering is to increase your dog's lifespan and health during that lifespan. Two newly published studies — both of them game-changers on this question — are worth looking at.

[A 20-year study by the University of Georgia](#) looked at more than 40,000 dogs from 1984 to 2004. Neutered dogs lived an average of 9.4 years, those not neutered averaged 7.9 years. The second study, done at the University of California , [looked at 795 golden retrievers](#). It found a significant increase in hip dysplasia and cruciate ligament rupture in neutered dogs — primarily those neutered before one year of age.

So when it comes to neutering, there isn't one answer that fits everyone. If you have a golden retriever whom you want to hike with for many years, you may not want to neuter him. On the other hand, if you have a breed that has a tendency towards aggression and you have young children, I will advise neutering.

So talk to your vet. Let them know your concerns and make an informed decision together. (Full disclosure: My standard poodle, Lincoln, is neutered.)

*Veterinarian Stephen Sheldon practices at Gypsum Animal Hospital, [gypsumah.com](http://gypsumah.com). He can also be heard Monday mornings at 8 a.m. on KZYR radio, 97.7 FM. E-mail questions or topic suggestions to [drsteve@gypsumah.com](mailto:drsteve@gypsumah.com)*

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