

**Should dogs get spayed/neutered after six months of age?**

Brooke Axiotis

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

ENGL 1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

Prof. Chris McCarthy

November 8, 2023

## **Should dogs get spayed/neutered after six months of age?**

On average, a single vet visit to combat issues with joint health in dogs comes to around \$750 (Kowalski, 2023) from *Market Watch*. Joint issues are just one of the potential side effects of altering or fixing (spaying/neutering) your pet before six months of age. Many believe, getting your dog altered before six months of age could help with problems. According to Dr. Brayshaw, (2023) from *Animal Humane Society*, says spaying/neutering your dog early can help with: unplanned breeding that could occur, prevents female puppies from getting their first heat cycle, or could help with the possibility that you don't want your puppy to be put under anesthesia because of the small risk of health issues that could occur. Although, these benefits are true, getting your dog fixed too early can do more harm than good in some cases. Additionally, other doctors and researchers from veterinary clinics, such as Dr. Jerry Klein (2021), Harari (2023), Elanco (2021), and more, have conducted studies and further research to prove that delaying the spay/neuter is beneficial towards your dog. Nonetheless, spaying or neutering your dog once they are six months of age can give them time to fully develop, reduce health risks including joint disorders, and lower chances of your dog developing behavioral problems.

Having prior knowledge on the topic of spays and neuters can be essential to any dog owner. This can ultimately help owners know when it's a good time to spay or neuter your dog. What is a spay and what is a neuter? According to Jean Bauhaus, (2023) from *Care Credit*, she says that spaying is "the removal of a female's uterus and ovaries." She also states that neutering is "the removal of a male's testicles and associated structures." Getting your dog fixed helps for unwanted puppies and, also makes so the dog won't be able to breed with other canines. The

growing debate on when you should spay/neuter your dog. Whether you get them fixed before or after six months of age. But why does the time-period matter? Many studies have concluded that there is a difference between the time-period of when your dog gets fixed. *American Kennel Club*'s Dr. Jerry (2023) states, "often the spay and neuter take place at a very young age for pets, at four to six months. However, studies have shown that this may not be the best age to spay or neuter your dog." Dr. Jerry (2023) then goes into talk about how years ago the connection between sex hormones and canine health wasn't taken into consideration when spays and neuters took place before the dog was six months old. Now today, we are seeing the alterations that took place back then has affected the health of some dogs. Knowing that back then important details about a dog's body wasn't thoroughly thought about, makes it so now today we know what to do better, and we know what's best for your dog. Growing up fostering different types of animals, mainly dogs and puppies, I was aware about the effects of wrongly timed spays/neuters. Fostering is a way to help with this because dogs are typically put up for foster care if they are too young to get fixed, meaning; they send the dogs to homes to make sure they get enough time to develop their bodies. The humane society does this to prevent dogs from getting fixed too early.

Some owners would spay or neuter their dog at any time without thinking just because the dog needs to get fixed. Although, there isn't a specific age designed for spays and neuters, the size, weight, and breed of your dog plays a big factor in the time that they get fixed. Spring House Animal Hospital (2023) states that "Toy breeds only take as little as 6 - 9 months to reach maturity, whereas medium to large breed dogs typically reaches maturity around 12 months of age, and giant breeds can take as long as 18 months to reach maturity" This gives an

understanding of how development plays a big role in dog spays and neuters. Imagine this, you get a Great Dane dog, a large breed typically known for its size. Without prior knowledge you take this dog and get it spayed or neutered at six months of age. This Great Dane will now most likely be underdeveloped, due to the owner not getting it fixed at the correct time. Even though small dogs develop maturity faster, you should still wait six months to get them fixed, likewise, large and giant breed dogs should be delayed from spays/neuters until at least 9-12 months to develop maturity. A study conducted with Labrador retrievers and German shepherds by Brulliard, (2023) from *Washington Post*, concluded that in both breeds they found joint disorders due to early “sterilization” (neutering). Having joint disorders is a sign of an underdeveloped dog. Although, it’s hard to tell an exact time that these dogs were fixed, the study said both dogs were neutered early. Which again is why knowing the size, weight, and breed of your dog is important to avoid health issues like joint disorder when getting the alterations done. Like in my previous example with the Great Dane, and how if you went and altered the dog before it was fully developed that it would cause problems with the growth of their joints and health. On the flip side, say you have a Chihuahua, a small breed typically known for its size. You wait 18 months, which previously stated was the time a giant dog would get fixed at, however; the Chihuahua should’ve got fixed around 6-9 months due to its size, weight, and breed. Now that you’ve spayed or neutered this dog it will most definitely be developed and won’t have joint problems, but now that you’ve waited this long to fix the small dog it could possibly breed or get other dogs pregnant due to them developing maturity faster. This affects the population control and is overall not something to want to happen out of the blue. Knowing when to get your dog altered can play a big role in the dog’s lives and others around them.

Most people would say it's confusing or hard to figure when the right time is to spay or neuter your dog, but there's a few observations you need to look out for in your canines to figure out when you should get the alterations done. Thompson (2023) from *Bone Voyage* concludes that being attentive to your male dog is necessary for their "well-being". Thompson (2023) also states "excessive marking, aggression towards other dogs, mounting behaviors, and an urge to roam are all potential indicators that it's time to consider neutering your furry companion." These indicators are simple but are important to look out for when you think it's time to neuter your male dog. The indicators in female dogs can be more difficult to spot. In female dogs, some owners would prefer to get them spayed before they enter their heat cycle (a dog's menstrual cycle) to reduce the future risk of mammary cancer. But like stated previously, you want to wait until the dog is fully developed, which is different to all dog's but in the case that you want to spay your female dog before their heat cycle here's what to look out for. Elanco (2021) states that some signs that indicate that your dog is going into heat is: "a swollen vulva, behavior quirks; skittish or aggressive around other dogs, increased licking of the vaginal area, and vaginal spot bleeding." These are all signs to look out for if you spay your dog before its heat (around 6-9 months). Having the signs and indicators is truly important, this is how you figure out when to spay or neuter your dog. Like in the previous paragraph knowing when to fix your dog is important because it could affect their body and health. If you can't tell if your dog is showing signs that they should get fixed, you can and should go to your local vet to figure out when's a good time to get the alterations done, this way you can be sure that the time-period is correct by checking with your veterinarian.

It may be a concern to people that putting your dog under anesthesia at a young age could have possible risks towards their health, but spaying or neutering your dog before six months can cause worse risks towards their health as well. Bauhaus (2023) from *Care Credit* had research done by the University of California to find out the potential risks that could occur from early fixing. The risks concluded different types of cancers like “osteosarcoma, hemangiosarcoma, mast cell tumors, and lymphoma.” The same study also found spaying or neutering your dog before maturity (before six months of age) can “increase risks of developing joint injuries or disorders like hip or elbow dysplasia or a ruptured cranial cruciate ligament.” The joint injuries and disorders caused from early fixing can do a lot of harm towards a dog body. Harari (2022) from *Merck Manual* lets us know that Osteochondrosis (a joint disorder and disease) causes “Fragments of cartilage to separate from the end of a bone and float loose in the joint cavity. This results in inflammation of the affected joint, and it can lead to arthritis and continued cartilage breakdown, severely affecting joint motion.” This is just one of the many joint problems a dog can accumulate over the span of early fixing. Hearing that your dog could possibly developed cancer from early fixation, is not a good. Yes, some cancers in dogs can be treated if found early enough, but what happens if it can’t be treated. Even if the cancer can be treated, you’d spend more on the cancer treatment, than you would on the spay or neuter.

Joint disorders in dogs can be caused by many things such as injury to the joint, immune-related conditions, or infections, but one reoccurring way joint disorders are found is through underdeveloped dogs, said by Harari (2022). Like previously stated, dogs can develop joint disorders and diseases from being spayed or neutered too early. Harris (2020) from *Vet Help Direct*, makes a good comparison, to how puberty in humans helps our bodies develop growth

spurts, and that growing has correlation to good bone alignment in our joints. So, it would make perfect sense that preventing a dog from fully maturing/developing would cause problems in their joints. Harris (2020) further adds that “In a smaller dog, with smaller joints, the mismatch isn’t enough to cause a problem. However, in a large breed dog, it can cause disease.” Meaning, although, spaying or neutering early may not affect small dog joints, it will most definitely affect a bigger dogs joints, like German Shepherds or Golden Retrievers. A specific joint disorder that Dr. Brayshaw, (2023) from *Animal Humane Society* mentions is: growth plates being delayed by spay/neuter, resulting in disproportional long limbs in German Shepherds and Golden Retrievers. Meaning the dogs grow taller than they should, resulting in joint problems leading to irritation, limping or stiffness, hard time running or jumping, and overall, their forelegs (front legs) are at risk. Having these joint problems like hip dysplasia would have your dog in pain due to the ball and socket not fitting together properly (Brayshaw, 2023), which ultimately hurts your dog by the socket and ball not aligning as they should, which rubs against the surface of the joint.

Additionally, some dog owners believe that neutering your dog early can reduce signs of aggression and other behavioral problems, in some cases this is true, but neutering too early can also potentially, give dogs undesirable behavioral problems, (Scott, 2022). Scott (2022) from *Dogs naturally* says, “Neutering had been previously linked to cognitive impairment and even a three-fold risk of hypothyroidism (which often creates behavior changes).” Scott (2022) also did a viszla study and found that dogs that were neutered early had problems such as separation anxiety, timidity, hyperactivity, fear biting, and fear of storms and noises. With dogs showing signs of behavioral problems this could lead to an owner giving up on training, leading to, an un-behaved dog. Having to train behavioral changes out of a dog can be quite hard when you think

about it. If your dog develops a fear of storms or noises, those aren't something that can easily go away, these fears can go through out a dog's lifetime. Like mentioned before, fear biting is another form of a behavioral change. This change is possible one of the worst changes that could happen to a dog from early fixing. The dog might've had no signs of aggression in them before the surgery, but after getting the dog neutered and seeing that there could be a risk of hypothyroidism (creates behavioral change) the dog could than show signs of fear biting, which might be portrayed as aggression. An owner might see that the dog is biting because it's mad or anger, and possibly give the dog to a shelter because they think its aggressive. But really it has developed hypothyroidism and has started to fear bite, meaning; their scared of their surroundings causing them to bite. The dog would be misunderstood and could suffer from consequences because of it. The consequences differ for each owner, but some could be severe like giving the dog away or possible putting the dog down in some cases due to aggression. This is a hypothetical outcome of a behavioral change, but depending on the change and how the owner wants to deal with the change, it could but the dog in harm. All of this could happen due to neutering your dog too early.

As a result of waiting until after 6 months to spay or neuter your dog you will be able to let them grow and develop properly, you'll be able to see the indicators of when it's time to fix your dog, reduce health risks, reduce joint disorders, and possible stray away from your dog developing behavioral issues. As a person who works closely with the Coon Rapids humane society, I've seen the affects that early sterilization has on dogs. By fostering over 20 plus dogs and puppies, I've seen the positives and negatives of both sides of the debate. Additionally, I have two dogs of my own, one got spayed before six months of age and suffered from a joint

disorder, and the other got spayed around the eighth month mark and had no health or behavioral problems. All in all, that \$750 (Kowalski, 2023), that would've been spent on one vet visit from a dog who got altered too early, could be ultimately back in your pocket if you wait until the dog is fully developed, after 6 months of age.

## References

Bauhaus. J. M. (2023, May 26). Dog spay vs neuter: How it works, benefits, and what age guidelines, Benefits, and costs. *Care credit*. <https://www.carecredit.com/well-u/pet-care/dog-spay-vs-neuter/>

Brayshaw. Dr. G. (2023). Pros and cons of spaying or neutering your dog or cat at an early age. *Animal Humane Society*. <https://www.animalhumaneociety.org/resource/pros-and-cons-spaying-or-neutering-your-dog-or-cat-early-age#:~:text=Some%20retrospective%20studies%20have%20recently,to%20hip%20or%20joint%20issues>

Brulliard, K. (2019, October 11). The growing debate over spaying and neutering dogs. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2019/10/11/growing-debate-over-spaying-neutering-dogs/>

Dr. Jerry Klein, C. (2021, December 27). What is the best age to neuter or spay your dog?. *American Kennel Club*. <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/vets-corner/neutering-spaying-right-age-dog/>

Elanco. (2021). How to tell if your dog is in heat - and what to do about it. *Elanco Your Pet & You*. <https://yourpetandyou.elanco.com/us/behavior/how-to-tell-if-your-dog-is-in-heat>

Harari, J. (2023, October 5). Other joint disorders in dogs - dog owners. *Merck Veterinary Manual*. <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/dog-owners/bone,-joint,-and-muscle-disorders-of-dogs/other-joint-disorders-in-dogs#:~:text=Fragments%20of%20cartilage%20may%20separate,breakdown%2C%20severely%20affecting%20joint%20motion>

Harris, D. (2020, September 4). Newsflash: Joint disease risk in dogs neutered early. *Vet Help Direct*. <https://vethelpdirect.com/vetblog/2020/09/04/newsflash-joint-disease-risk-in-dogs-neutered-early/#>

Kowalski, E. (2023, October 27). How much does a vet visit cost? (2023). *MarketWatch*. <https://www.marketwatch.com/guides/pet-insurance/how-much-does-a-vet-visit-cost/>

Scott, D. (2022, July 19). Early neutering in dogs: Risks & benefits. *Dogs Naturally*. <https://www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/three-reasons-to-reconsider-spayneuter/>

*Spring House Animal Hospital*. (2023). How Old is Too Old to Spay or Neuter my Dog. *Ambler Vets*. <https://www.springhouseanimalhospital.com/site/blog/2022/06/15/how-old-is-too-old-to-spay-or-neuter-my->

dog#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20while%20it,until%20the%20pet%20reaches%20maturity.

Thompson, A. (2023, October 11). 4 signs your dog needs to be neutered. *Bone Voyage Dog Rescue*. <https://bonevoyagedogrescue.com/4-signs-your-dog-needs-to-be-neutered/#:~:text=of%20this%20decision.-,Conclusion,consider%20neutering%20your%20furry%20companion>