Neutering of dogs
Male dogs

Why castrate a male dog?

- Entire male dogs can have a tendency to roam and look for bitches on heat. This increases the risk of them becoming lost and/or involved in road traffic accidents.

- Some un-castrated male dogs develop aggressive behaviour towards other male dogs when they mature. Castration prevents or reduces this behaviour. Other forms of aggression are not reliably stopped by castration, however, and in these instances it may be necessary for the dog to be taken for a behavioural consultation.

- Entire male dogs can develop medical problems with their testicles or prostate. Castration can prevent or often cure such diseases.

- A number of un-castrated male dogs show hypersexual behaviour towards people or objects, which can be problematic for both the owner and the dog! This problem usually significantly reduces and may even disappear several weeks after castration.

Are there any problems associated with castrating male dogs?

- There is a small risk associated with performing any operation under general anaesthesia - this is the case for every operative procedure.

- Castrated dogs generally need fewer calories, which means that there can be a tendency for them to put on weight. Being aware of this and feeding them with an eye on their waistline will prevent extra weight gain. There is no automatic increase in weight after castration, it all comes down to giving the correct amount of food for your dog's needs.
How do I arrange to have my dog castrated?

The first step in having your dog castrated is to arrange an appointment. We may know your dog already because he has been to us for his vaccinations, in which case you may be able to just book an appointment for the operation. If we have not seen your dog before or if we have not seen him for a longer period of time, we will ask to see him for a normal appointment first to perform a general health check. This is done to make sure that he is healthy enough to undergo general anaesthesia and to ascertain that both testicles are sitting in their normal anatomical position.

What happens next?

For the operation we will ask you to bring your dog to the surgery at about 7.45 am on the appointed day. It is very important that he is starved during the night before the surgery and that he has nothing at all to eat on that morning. If there is any food in the stomach, the anaesthetic risk is higher than usual, so this point cannot be overemphasised.

Initially your dog will be given a so-called premedication (‘pre-med’), which contains a sedative and a strong pain killer. He will then be anaesthetised and the testicles will be removed.

The wound is usually closed with sutures that are not visible on the outside. After waking up, your dog can go home on the same day, usually in the afternoon. He may still be a bit ‘light-headed’, but should be fully awake. He can eat a small light meal and should just be allowed to rest.

We advise that you keep your dog quiet for about 10 days. Lead-walking is advised, and running or playing should be avoided as vigorous exercise can result in wound-healing problems. Furthermore, it is very important that he does not lick his wound as this could delay healing and cause infection. Most dogs leave well alone, but if necessary he may have to wear an Elizabethan collar to prevent damage to the wound.

It will take 10 days for the wound to heal fully and it is important that you monitor your dog well during that time. We will ask you to bring him for a postoperative check-up appointment 5 to 7 days after the operation. Should anything look unusual or should you be unsure about anything at all before or after the appointment, you should contact us for advice.
Female Dogs

Why spay a bitch?

- Bitches come on heat (‘in season’) about twice a year. The start of the season is usually made noticeable by a bloody discharge from the vulva which can last for 5 to 7 days. During, and especially straight after this period, bitches can be mated. They are very attractive to male dogs during that time and will actively search for males as well. Controlling a bitch on heat can be much more difficult than people think, so the danger of having a pregnant bitch and a litter of unwanted puppies is very real. Coping with the extra work and finding loving homes for all the puppies can be extremely demanding, especially for owners who are not used to this situation.

- In older bitches, hormonal problems not uncommonly lead to the development of an infected uterus (pyometra). Pyometra usually presents as an emergency and can be fatal if not treated promptly. The condition can be avoided by having a bitch spayed while she is young.

- Spaying bitches before maturity is reached (usually when they are 6 to 8 months old) will reduce the probability of malignant growths in their mammary glands (‘breast cancer’) later in life. If they are spayed after they have had one or more seasons, this added benefit no longer applies.

Are there any problems associated with spaying bitches?

- There is a small risk associated with performing any operation under general anaesthesia - this is the case for every operative procedure.

- Spayed bitches generally need fewer calories, which means there can be a tendency for them to put on weight. Being aware of this and feeding them with an eye on their waistline will prevent extra weight gain. There is no automatic increase in weight after spaying, it all comes down to giving the correct amount of food for your dog’s needs.

- Urinary incontinence (dribbling urine) is a problem that can develop in bitches whether or not they have been spayed, especially as they get older. However, spaying may increase the likelihood of incontinence problems developing, especially in bitches spayed before their first season. It is not a problem that we see on a very regular basis, but occasionally it can occur. In the majority of dogs cases the problem can be controlled with medication.

- Changes in coat quality have occasionally been observed in spayed bitches, especially in longhaired breeds. This is not something that we see on a regular basis but it can occur in individual dogs.
When should I have my bitch spayed?

If your bitch has already had a season then the surgery should be performed three months after the end of the season, when the uterus (womb) and blood vessels are at their ‘quietest’. If she is a puppy and not yet had a season, then your vet will discuss with you the best timing of the procedure.

How do I arrange to have my bitch spayed?

The first step in having your bitch spayed is to arrange a consultation with one of our primary clinic vets. This is often conveniently combined with the free six month health checks we offer to dogs who have had their primary vaccine course with us. If we have not seen your bitch before or not seen her for a longer period of time, we will ask you to arrange a pre-op appointment to perform a general health check. This is done to make sure that your bitch is healthy enough to undergo general anaesthesia and the operation, and that she is not currently in season.

Are there options in how the procedure is performed?

At Willows we are very fortunate to be able to offer either traditional or laparoscopic ‘keyhole’ surgical neutering procedures for bitches.

The traditional spay technique is performed by a member of our primary team of veterinary surgeons. It involves a midline incision on the underside of the abdomen (tummy) and an ovario-hysterectomy, which means removal of the ovaries and the uterus (womb). The comfort and welfare of our patients is always extremely important to us, and pain relief is provided before, during and after the procedure. The surgical and suture techniques used are ones which help to minimise discomfort.

The laparoscopic (keyhole) technique is performed by one of our highly trained Specialist soft tissue surgeons after referral of the patient by one of our primary clinic vets. During this sophisticated surgery, a rigid endoscope is used to view the internal organs and special instrumentation is used to perform an ovariectomy, i.e. removal of the ovaries only. This technique has the advantage of being less invasive, with only two small holes being made in the abdominal wall. Pain relief is provided but recovery from this procedure is more swift than with a traditional, larger incision surgery. There is no evidence that leaving the uterus behind results in any increased risk of incontinence or womb infection in the future, when compared to conventional surgery. If you are interested in laparoscopic ovariectomy please discuss this with one of the primary vets. Should you decide to go ahead, the Specialist surgeon will examine your bitch on the morning of the operation and discuss the procedure with you. Please note that permission is always gained for the surgeon to convert to a traditional spay technique, should technical issues make the laparoscopic technique inappropriate.

What happens on the day?

On the day of the operation we will ask you to bring your bitch to the surgery between about 7.45am and 8am (unless otherwise specified). She should have been starved since 8pm the night before but have had free access to water until the time you leave the house. Food in the stomach at the time of anaesthetic can cause anaesthetic complications.

Initially your bitch will be given a premedication injection (‘pre-med’), which contains a combination of sedatives and pain killers. The procedure will usually take place in the morning. Most bitches are free to go home the same evening, although slight wooziness after the anaesthetic is not uncommon. The sutures are soluble (dissolving) and buried under the skin, so are not visible on the outside. A dressing may be applied to the wound. Your bitch may be provided with an Elizabethan collar to prevent her licking the wound and causing an infection. A small light meal should be offered that evening, and she should just be allowed to rest. She will be sent home with pain killing medication.

We advise that you keep your bitch quiet for about 10 days after the surgery. Lead-walking only is advised during this period, and running or playing should be avoided. Vigorous exercise could result in problems with wound healing. You may need to lift her gently into and out of the car.

It will take 10 days for the wounds to heal fully, and it is important that you monitor your bitch closely during that time. We will ask you to bring her for a postoperative check-up appointment five to seven days after the operation. Should anything look unusual, or should you be unsure about anything at all before or after the appointment, you should contact us for advice.