



Should I get my dog castrated? A Blue House guide



This is a question that all owners of male dogs will probably ask themselves at some time. The answer depends on a number of factors, but mainly centres on the individual dog and its situation. We do not generally recommend that castration is performed on every male dog. We would always want to discuss you and your dog's individual situation and would be happy to perform the procedure if you decide to do so.

What is castration?

Also known as neutering, castration is a surgical procedure carried out under general anaesthetic which removes both an animal's testicles. It is a relatively routine operation which does not usually require an overnight stay. It can be done from 6 months of age onwards.

The main reasons castrations are carried out are usually either to:

- Prevent accidental mating and unwanted puppies
- Treat certain medical conditions including testicular cancer and prostate disease.
- Treat certain behaviour problems
- Correct a problem - In some dogs one or both testicles fail to drop properly into the scrotum at birth. This is thought to be largely a hereditary condition, and therefore affected animals should not be bred from (and cannot be shown). Retained testicles have a high risk of becoming cancerous and we therefore recommend that all monorchid (one testicle descended) and cryptorchid (no testicles descended) animals should be castrated.

If castration is being sought as a cure for certain behaviour problems (such as inter-family dog to dog aggression) we may suggest referral to a specialist canine behaviourist before undertaking castration. Castration in certain dogs can lead to a worsening of behaviour problems especially in nervous or aggressive dogs. It can also lead to improvement in certain behaviours such as excessive mating behaviour, urine marking and wandering after bitches in season.

What are the alternatives?

The first alternative is to consider if your dog actually needs castration. If you are not having any problems it may not be necessary.

There are **chemical alternatives** to castration which may be suitable for your dog depending on the reasons for castration. These will allow you and your vet to assess the benefits that castration would bring to your individual dog.

One of these is a cylindrical implant called **Suprelorin**, of similar size to a microchip, which can be implanted in the back of the neck between the shoulder blades with no anaesthetic required. A drug is released from the implant which suppresses the male hormones giving the effect of castration without the surgery. The effect is designed to last 6 months, but in smaller dogs is more likely to last 12 months. This may be particularly suitable for dogs with behaviour issues. Often we find that if testosterone is suppressed during the "adolescent" flush of hormones at around 12-18 months, by the time the implant wears off it is no longer needed.

Other products are available in tablet or injection form, which may be used if your dog is diagnosed with prostate problems or if a shorter length effect is required.

Some owners mistakenly believe that allowing their dog to mate will reduce their dog's frustrations and consequently ease behavioural problems. This is not the case and in many cases things can get worse as the dogs interest in females increases further.

What are the disadvantages of castration?

- **Weight gain** – Castration does not automatically make dogs put on weight, but removal of the male hormones will slow your dog's metabolic rate and may increase his appetite. We find that in breeds prone to weight gain (especially Labradors) castration can make it very difficult to control their weight. Weight gain can be combatted by regular weight checks and by reducing food allowance accordingly.
- **Surgical risk** – As with all operations under general anaesthetic you should be aware that there is a small element of risk.
- **Complications** - thankfully we find that complications are very rare, but could include infection or the dog interfering with the wound.
- **Desired result not achieved** – castration cannot be guaranteed as a solution to behavioural problems.

If you are unsure then please give us a ring or make an appointment to discuss castration with one of the vets or nurses. We can then come to a decision with you considering your dog's own individual circumstances.

Myself and my vet have decided that my dog needs castrating – what happens next?

Once the vet has examined your pet and is happy that your pet is healthy, you can book him in for his surgery with the receptionist. You will be asked not to feed him after 10.00pm the night before the operation, and to remove the water bowl first thing in the morning. This is important as a full stomach increases the risk of your pet being sick when coming round from the anaesthetic, which can be dangerous. You will be asked to bring your pet to the surgery between 8 and 9am on the morning of the operation.

The nurse will admit your dog, and you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. Please read this carefully and ask about anything you are not sure of. The nurse will also take details of how you can be contacted during the day, and when you should phone for an update. If your pet has not yet been microchipped we can do this whilst your dog is under the anaesthetic. The vet or nurse may recommend that a **pre-anaesthetic blood test** is carried out. This allows us to screen for problems in the liver and kidneys which may not be evident from the clinical examination, and to check the blood sugar and protein levels. It also checks if your pet is anaemic.

If your pet has shown any signs of being unwell in the recent past or has any allergies to medication, then please bring this to his attention. A nurse will then take your pet through to the hospital area where he will be weighed, his temperature, pulse and respiration levels recorded, and given a pre-med injection. This reduces any anxiety, allows a smoother transition into and out of anaesthesia and reduces the anaesthetic dose we need to use. It also provides postoperative pain relief. Your pet is then bedded down in our kennels until he is ready for the operation.

An intravenous catheter is placed into the leg through which a short acting anaesthetic is administered which causes the animal to fall asleep within a few seconds. A tube is then placed into the animal's airway and connected to an anaesthetic machine that keeps him asleep on a gaseous anaesthetic for the duration of the operation. All of our patients in for castration will receive intravenous fluids as standard to help maintain blood pressure during the procedure.

A nurse monitors the anaesthetic throughout the operation. The surgery itself involves making a small (2-4cm) incision in front of the scrotum and removing both of the testicles through this. We use stitches underneath the skin surface to close the wound in the majority of cases, so there will not be any stitches for you to see (or for your dog to pull out hopefully!). Once the operation is over your pet is kept on oxygen until he starts to wake up, which takes only a few minutes. Your pet will be given a pain relieving injection and returned to kennels where he is given a comfy bed and monitored until fully conscious.

All castrations go home with 3 days pain relief. Most dogs will not require an Elizabethan collar to prevent interfering with the wound, but you can have one if required. We ask owners to bring their pets in for a post op check with the nurse 2-3 days following surgery. There is no extra charge for this check-up, but if antibiotics or other medications are required these will be charged for (not usually needed).