DESEXING- YES OR NO??

At some stage, during the first 4-10 months of your pup’s life, you have to make the decision on whether you should desex your dog or. You will get various opinions and suggestions from everywhere on, but there are a facts and myths worth knowing about, that may help you make that choice.

Firstly I must say that I am quite biased on this topic. My view is that if you are not a professional breeder and do not have intentions to ‘show’ your dog, then you really should not be breeding. That is both my personal and professional opinion, having worked as a veterinary nurse for many years before becoming a dog trainer. I have seen firsthand the devastating effects of hormone related tumours in both male and female dogs and they could have been avoided. I have also seen too many puppies born to dogs that have inherited disorders and owners should be made accountable for producing puppies with these problems.

And just take a walk down at your local pound and you will soon see why desexing is highly recommended.

Here are 10 things you need to know about desexing, hormone related disorders and breeding.

1. Dogs do not get fat because of desexing. Dogs become fat after desexing because most owners are still feeding them large quantities of puppy food. The main growth in a dog slows down dramatically in most dogs at around 6 months of age so it tends to coincide with the surgery. Whether the dog is desexed or not, its meal quantity needs to be cut back

2. Dogs are not stunted in their growth if they are desexed early. Dogs actually grow slightly bigger if they are desexed very early. This is because the hormones that trigger maturity (mainly testosterone) also trigger the long bones to stop growing as maturity is fast approaching. With early desexing, the hormones do not get a chance to build in large volume and circulate, hence the bones are not told to stop growing. They will eventually stop as there are still some hormones being produced for normal body functions, but just not in the amount of an entire dog. Genetics will still also dictate how big your pup will grow, irrespective of whether it is desexed or not. Desexing between 6-10 months of age will still allow for normal growth and development.

3. Dogs do not calm down once they have had a litter of pups. Breeding has no calming influence on the behaviour of a bitch. It can make them broodier and more protective if anything, but the calmness is purely the dog’s natural temperament and the age it has hit. Desexing also will not necessarily calm a male dog down. Exuberant behaviour is part of the personality and desexing does not alter it. The dog will eventually settle down, much like the bitch, when maturity hits.

4. Some owners feel that their male dogs feel better if they have had an attempt at mating before being desexed. I personally think it is almost cruel to allow a male dog to have a go at mating only to then take him to the clinic and castrate him. Male dogs are simply better off not knowing what they are missing out on. There is too much at stake with undesirable behavioural changes creeping in by leaving them intact or waiting for them to have a go. Once
these male behaviours start, they are there to stay and desexing will not necessarily make them go away although they may reduce a little.

5. Desexed dogs develop very few hormone related disorders. Here is a list of various disorders that are completely avoided simply through desexing.

Mammary cancer - the same as breast cancer, tumours develop in the mammary glands and can start once the bitch has had her first season. These tumours then commonly spread to other organs like the lungs and liver. Tumours can be removed but the spreading cancers cannot.

Uterine cancer – tumours develop in the uterus or uterine lining.

Pyometra - the uterus fills with pus instead of puppies and usually occurs within one month after a season. It is life threatening and will kill the bitch if she is not rushed into emergency surgery. Signs are often increased thirst, increased urination and lack of appetite and if 2-4 weeks after the breeding cycle finished.

Testicular cancer - tumours of the testes develop and they are very painful and by the time they are found, other tumours have often spread to other organs.

Prostate cancer - very common in male dogs, this tumour causes pain, discomfort and bleeding in the urine. Sometimes these tumours go by undetected because the dog is very tolerant and when these tumours are eventually found and removed, they are the size of cantaloupes.

Perianal or perineal hernias – are very common in male dogs and are recognised by one or two bulges on either side of the dog’s anus. They are extremely painful and require major surgery to repair them and can often reoccur.

Eclampsia or milk fever - this is often seen two weeks after a bitch has her puppies and is more common in the small breeds. Her heart beats at a dangerously fast speed and she is at risk of dying unless she is given intravenous calcium. This problem is caused because the suckling puppies have drawn high amounts of calcium from the milk and have left the body depleted.

6. Breeding really should be left to the breeders whose primary aim is to produce the highest quality dogs both in conformation and temperament. Good breeders are registered with their club and compete against each other and others around the country and they strive to produce good sound puppies. Their reputation is ultimately at stake so it in their best interest to produce their best.

There are many inherited disorders that breeders know about and strive to avoid. Here is a list of a few of these disorders that many breeders know about.

Hip dysplasia - poor joint formation or deformation of the hip joint where mobility can be limited. Pain is a common side effect of this disorder. The hip ball is supposed to sit inside the socket, not out of it.
Elbow dysplasia - poor joint formation or deformation of the elbow joint where mobility can be limited. Pain and intermittent lameness often occurs.

Carpal deformities - abnormal growth where the bones and muscles do not grow at the same time causing the wrists joints to turn outwards.

Overshot and undershot jaws - incorrect formation of the lower jaw where dental issues and feeding issues can occur.

These dogs often require extensive dental therapy to correct mouth problems associated with the jaw deformities. The most common being the undershot jaw as seen here. These dogs often have ulcers in their mouth from teeth pressing into the gums and dental disease because the teeth do no clean properly when eating.

In some breeds like Boxers and Bulldogs, undershot jaws are normal but they can sometimes be exaggerated as well as seen in other breeds.

Eye disorders such as PRA (Progressive Retinal Atrophy) a type of degenerative blindness at an early age, cataracts, eyelid deformities (entropians and ectropians) and eyelashes growing on the inner eyelids (distichiasis), lens deformities, can occur.

Eyelid deformities like this can cause chronic inflammation, infection, injury and dry eye and is avoidable through good breeding.

Wobblers Syndrome (spinal and nerve disorder seen in Dobermans) affects the spine and gait so the dog wobbles as it moves. It progressively gets worse and is similar to Parkinson’s disease. Most dogs do not live a full life due to this disease.

Von Willebrand’s (haemophilia in dogs) is very common in Dobermans and German Shepherds and becoming increasingly diagnosed in other breeds. These dogs are at risk of bleeding and are at high risk when in surgery or injured.

Knee disorders- Legg Perthes Disease (where the hip ball joint does not develop properly), Luxating Patellas (slipping knee caps commonly seen in small dogs)-both these disorders cause lameness, skipping on the hind legs and pain when walking and need to be surgically corrected.

Various cancers-commonly seen in Boxers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Rottweilers, German Shepherds (mast cell tumour, squamous cell carcinoma, haemangiosarcoma, osteosarcoma, lymphosarcoma.

Immune disorders- commonly seen in Border Collies, Weimaraners, Rhodesian Ridgebacks, Hungarian Vizslas, German Shepherds, Dobermans, Rottweilers.

Many of these inherited disorders and diseases can be tested for and responsible breeders screen their breeding stock to ensure they are not passing on affected genes. If these issues do suddenly appear in a litter, most breeders will not continue to breed from that line.
If you seriously want to breed from your dog, then it is important that you are aware of potential inherited disorders and that it is screened before you go ahead. You also need to ensure the other mate is screened for the same problems.

7. Breeding can be an amazing experience for adults as well as children but there can also be many complications during the process. Many bitches, especially first timers, get exhausted and stressed during labour and this can result in an emergency caesarean. This can be a potentially life threatening surgery as there is a lot of pressure on the bitch’s organs and then there is also the efforts required to resuscitate the puppies. Caesareans can be very costly and they tend to always happen in the night when only emergency clinics are open. The cost of an emergency caesarean can cost in excess of $1500.

You also run the risk of the bitch rejecting the puppies to being very heavy handed with them and this means you are completely responsible for feeding and cleaning the puppies for up to 6 weeks with the first 3 weeks being round the clock nursing.

You then have the expenses of worming, vaccination, cleaning, feeding as they wean and advertising to sell them. These costs add up, especially if the litter was large and it is not often you hear of breeders making a bundle of money with the litter they bred. Most breeders breed their dogs because they have high quality, highly prized dogs and want to give others the chance to own one.

8. Desexing your male dog can dramatically reduce male inter-dog aggression. This is often fuelled by hormones and the need to challenge other male dogs for possible mates. Desexing before sexual maturity can decrease this possible outcome. Desexing also has been shown to decrease anxiety and anxiety related disorders in dogs, especially males.

9. Some owners notice that their male dog has reached maturity, yet its testes have not descended and this is quite common. It tends to also be genetic, meaning the sires had the same problem. There are two issues that arise from having undescended testes.

Unilateral retained testicle (where 1 has dropped out of the groin but the other is still up high in the groin or abdomen). Dogs with a retained testicle are at high risk of developing testicular cancer and exploratory surgery is the only way to prevent this. These dogs are still fertile and can breed but it is not recommended as this disorder is genetic and the risk of cancer is too high.

Bilateral retained testicles (where both testes have not descended). These dogs are sterile but can still mate and develop hormone related disorders. They too need exploratory surgery to detect and remove the testes.

10. If you walk down at Lost Dog’s Home or RSPCA or even Lort Smith, it does not take you long to work out the numbers of dogs waiting desperately to find new homes. This is not including the puppies in pet shops, puppy mills, markets and small animal shelters. Each year, hundreds of dogs are euthanased because their owners do not want them any longer or they cannot cope with their demands or cannot simply afford them. Breeding adds to this and unless the puppies are of such high quality in both conformation and temperament, that everyone wants one and will commit to one, it is just not worth adding to
this global problem. If everyone desexed their pet dog, there would be a lot less in the pounds, a lot less mistreated and a lot less euthanased each year.

The responsibility is ultimately yours.