

March 2022

Pyometras

There are many good reasons to get your pet spayed or neutered. One good reason to get your female dog or cat spayed is to prevent pyometras. But what is a pyometra?

A Danger for Intact Females

Pyometras are uterine infections that are seen in both intact female dogs and cats. Pyometras are a result of hormone fluctuations. Shortly after a female undergoes her heat cycle, there is a surge in progesterone, which normally prepares the uterus for pregnancy. This surge in progesterone causes the uterine wall to become thicker than normal, and actually creates an excellent breeding ground for bacteria to grow. Once the infection takes hold, purulent discharge (or pus) begins to accumulate in the uterine horns.

There are two types of pyometras: open and closed. In an open pyometra, the cervix is open, allowing all the discharge inside of the uterus to leak out the vulva. Oftentimes, the discharge is bloody or white-tinged, and is sometimes confused with a UTI. With a closed pyometra, the cervix is closed. Closed pyometras are more dangerous, as the discharge inside the uterus has nowhere to escape and continues to accumulate inside the uterus. This causes the uterine horns to expand, and when filled with enough fluid, these uterine horns can actually rupture, causing pus to fill the abdomen.

Treating Pyometras

Once an animal has a pyometra, what is the next step? Unfortunately, treating with antibiotics often does not help. While the antibiotics can help in the short term, it is often not enough to get completely rid of the entire infection in the uterus, and once the antibiotic course is completed, the infection will come right back. Therefore, the recommended treatment is to surgically remove the ovaries and the pus-filled uterine horns. This way, the infected tissues are removed, and the ovaries will no longer be present to cause the progesterone surge that starts and perpetuates the pyometra process. This surgery is more complicated than a typical spay, as the patient is often not healthy, and much gentler handling of the reproductive system is needed to prevent infection from entering the abdominal cavity.

Pyometras are relatively common in intact females. It is estimated that approximately 25% of intact females will eventually develop a pyometra during their lifetime. The best way to prevent pyometras are to spay your pet when they are young, before they have the chance to develop a pyometra! Call your veterinarian to learn more about the spaying process, and how it can prevent pyometras!

Best regards,

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