

The “Heat Cycle” in Dogs

WHAT EVERY DOG OWNER SHOULD KNOW

When female dogs begin their heat cycle, increased hormones make the uterus and vagina become bigger, and blood vessels that feed these organs become much larger than usual. Soon, there is almost always some bloody fluid that appears at the vulva. This first phase of the cycle is usually the only evidence the owner has that heat has arrived. After 5-14 days, the bleeding will end, and many owners believe this is the end of the heat. Actually, this is only the beginning.

Dogs are very different from cats and humans because if they do not actually become pregnant, they normally experience a “false pregnancy”. The “heat cycle” lasts 2-4 weeks and then the dog’s hormones are nearly the same as if she were really pregnant. The uterus and associated blood vessels are still enlarged, her mammary glands generally swell, and at the end of this phase she may even produce real milk as though she had actually given birth to a litter. This last phase of the heat cycle usually lasts 4-10 weeks.

Two facts should be clear. First the heat cycle is more complicated than most owners know. Second, the whole cycle lasts two to three months rather than the week-or-so that is most visible (bloody fluid at the vulva). Regardless of the phase of the heat cycle, the structures that are handled, sutured and removed during a spay surgery are much larger, and they have much larger blood vessels than those in a dog who is not in heat. These differences account for the small extra fee that is routinely charged by veterinary surgeons when a dog is spayed while “in heat” or in “late heat/false pregnancy”.

Thank you for bringing your dog to Arizona Spay Neuter!

