



Living with an Intact Male Dog

The NHSPCA normally requires that all cats and dogs receive spay or neuter surgery prior to adoption. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, veterinarians in some communities have stopped offering elective surgical services, including spay/neuter. Therefore, it has become necessary to adopt animals out before they have been spayed or neutered and plan to proceed with the spay or neuter surgery when our services become available again. Living with an intact (not spayed or neutered) dog can present some challenges, outlined below. It may take several months for normal spay/neuter services to resume in our community, so adopters need to be prepared for the possibility of living with an intact animal for months. Dog overpopulation is still an animal welfare concern, so you will need to follow up with your veterinarian to schedule an appointment for spay or neuter for your pet as soon as possible

Age and Time of Sexual Maturity

Dogs reach sexual maturity between 5-12 months of age, which is when you may start to notice hormonally-driven behavior problems. This is also when you need to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies. As the first heat can occur earlier in some cases, we recommend keeping intact male and female puppies separated from each other starting at ~4 months of age.

Special Considerations for Living with an Intact Female Dog

No Contact Between Intact Males and Females!

It is impossible to keep intact males and females in the same home without a high risk of pregnancy. When female dogs come into heat, intact males can become very forceful in their attempts to reach and mate females. Heat cycles are not always obvious, and female dogs can be fertile before signs of heat are noticeable to owners. This can make it hard to keep intact male and female dogs apart during heat.

Intact Dogs are Less Welcome in Public Places

Boarding facilities, training classes, and daycares may not allow intact dogs due to difficulties in keeping intact animals separate in such facilities.

Urine Marking

Intact dogs are at increased risk for urine marking. In male dogs, urine marking usually follows this pattern: the dog will approach a vertical surface, sniff it, turn around to lift one leg, and spray a small amount of urine on the vertical surface. This behavior is more common outdoors where there are lots of other dogs marking, but some dogs may be prone to engaging in the behavior indoors as well. Indoor urine marked areas should be cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner per package instructions. Focusing on house training and providing frequent opportunities to eliminate outdoors can help reduce urine

marking behavior. Neutering is the most effective treatment for urine marking – over 95% of male dogs will stop problematic urine marking when neutered.

Humping

One embarrassing (but natural) behavior that some intact male dogs sometimes engage in is humping. They may hump other dogs, people, or even objects such as furniture. It is important to work on training with intact male dogs before you need it, so you can use practiced cues such as Recall and Sit to distract dogs from humping. Once you have your dog's attention, give them another activity to occupy them, such as a puzzle feeder, training session, or a nice walk/play session outdoors. It is important not to allow the dog to continue the humping behavior, as it can be self-rewarding, so always find a way to positively interrupt the behavior. Do not punish the dog for humping as it is a natural behavior they are hormonally motivated to perform. Distraction with a previously-trained cue is the best response. Working on lots of rewards-based training with your dog throughout the day will maximize your chances of being able to interrupt humping behavior with a trained cue.

Roaming/Interest in Intact Females

Intact male dogs are hormonally motivated to roam, especially if there is an intact female anywhere within sniffing distance (farther than you might think). Off-leash training and hiking in unenclosed areas will need to be avoided until they can be neutered. Make sure yards are secure and always use a leash on walks.