

De-Sexing Lisa

For many years I have observed and been concerned about the detrimental effects of de-sexing in regard to behaviour. Through my dog training and behavioural consultations, it has become evident that dogs that are de-sexed before emotional maturity are at increased risk of developing fear and anxiety driven behavioural problems including aggression. Peer-reviewed science-based research is now supporting such conclusions. De-sexing is also known to increase the incidence of urinary incontinence, reduce cognitive ability, increase the risk of cruciate ligament rupture, cause obesity and increase the rates of various forms of cancer.



From the day Lisa was born, I have been agonising over her reproductive status. She is my first and only female Border Collie. I've always had boys and never considered de-sexing them. But Lisa coming into season every six months has been incredibly disruptive and distressing to our three entire male dogs who have all experienced planned matings.

So... at just over four years of age, Lisa has been de-sexed! At four years of age, I am confident that she is both physically and emotionally mature.



In her published research paper, Possible Relationship between Long-Term Adverse Health Effects of Gonad-Removing Surgical Sterilization and Luteinizing Hormone in Dogs, Michelle A Kutzler discusses, amongst many issues, the use of treatments that decrease circulating luteinizing hormone (LH), to restore urinary continence in de-sexed (spayed) bitches. I review this article with no Veterinarian nor scientific qualification to my name. My understanding is that after de-sexing, male and female dogs have increased levels of LH because the removed gonads (testes or ovaries) are no longer sending messages to the pituitary gland to reduce production. The circuitry has been broken. There are LH receptors throughout the body and we are still unaware of the full gamut of implications of raised LH levels (over 30 times higher in de-sexed dogs!)

Upon reflection, it occurred to me that if LH-targeting treatments have been successful in restoring urinary continence in de-sexed bitches; could they be successful in reducing or avoiding the development of incontinence and perhaps other detrimental effects of de-sexing? Is there any danger in administering LH-reducing treatments proactively in the absence of symptoms, rather than waiting for a sign that the de-sexed dog may be experiencing some other complication possibly associated with de-sexing? Who knows what other beneficial effects it could have?

I took my ponderings to our wonderful Veterinarian, Dr Jane Rickard at Hills District Veterinary Hospital at Dural. I will be forever thankful that although Jane had never shared my doubts around the de-sexing of dogs, she took my concerns seriously. She looked at the cited paper by Michelle A Kutzler and sought additional related research articles. She contacted her veterinarian colleague at Virbac (Australia) Pty Ltd who produce the implant, Suprelorin, a slow release Gonadotropin Releasing Hormone (GnRH) analogue. Suprelorin is the implant that is used to “chemically castrate” male dogs.

Jane and the Virbac veterinarian concluded that the implant would not cause any detrimental effects if implanted in Lisa at the time of her de-sexing and ongoing. However, they also advised that there is no proven benefit.



I made the decision to have Lisa implanted with Suprelorin with the aim of avoiding raised LH levels in the hope of reducing the risk of the detrimental effects of de-sexing. Of course, I understand that nothing can be proven one way or the other in one dog, but one day our clever scientific community will have definite conclusive evidence.

Here's hoping to improve the quality of life of dogs and their families.

Vicki Austin, CPDT-KA

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Lisa indicating on the presence of narcotic odour

