



ESN and why it is good for your puppy.

I get a lot of enquiries about ESN and its connection with urinary incontinence in female dogs. From what I hear from potential owners there still appears to be a lot of ill-informed opinion out there, most of it based on hearsay with no real factual basis. Sadly too many college lecturers have insufficient experience of ESN (or none at all), yet they will happily recycle the old myths to their students, the students become practitioners and so it goes ... Having said that, there is enough literature available to stop blanket condemnation of the procedure if people would just read it.

In December 2024, the **WSAVA** produced 136 pages of Guidelines for the Control of Reproduction in Dogs and Cats which is available here:

<https://wsava.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/J-of-Small-Animal-Practice-2024-Romagnoli-WSAVA-guidelines-for-the-control-of-reproduction-in-dogs-and-cats.pdf>

There is a lot of information to digest but basically it boils down to this; ESN and its associated benefits or disbenefits are not primarily age specific, they are mostly breed/size specific. Larger breeds are definitely over-represented when it comes to negative outcomes (especially those with an adult weight over 25kgs), smaller breeds less so. Our Australian Labradoodles hardly at all.

In 2024 we conducted our own survey of clients to ascertain exactly what clinical conditions had affected their Labradoodles throughout their lives, and whether these could be linked to ESN. We emailed just under 2000 clients getting around 1600 replies (we intend to publish the results later this year). The **WSAVA** report suggests that urinary sphincter mechanism incompetence (USMI) will occur in **3 to 20%** of all female dogs **any time after spaying**. Our study indicates the incidence of urinary incontinence in our Labradoodles post procedure is **2.03%**. Even this very small number will not all be attributable to ESN. Other factors are involved, in particular obesity.

What isn't in the survey (obviously, as it's not possible to quantify a negative) is **the total absence of all forms of mammary neoplasms (canine breast cancer) in our dogs.**

The **WSAVA** research shows that the age of an animal when spayed is crucial in avoiding mammary neoplasms. The incidence in female dogs spayed at more than 2 years of age was between **4.9 - 5.3%** %. Two independent studies (not ours) quoted in the same report demonstrated that no female dog spayed before puberty developed mammary neoplasia. Female dogs which had not been neutered had an incidence ranging between **8.4 – 52%**. Ours is **zero**.

ESN in these little dogs is safe, quick and effective, we haven't lost a single pup in almost 2000 procedures. This compares very favourably with complications arising from adult spays, the figures quoted varying between **6 - 27%** some of which very sadly will be deaths. The incision is tiny (8mm), the procedure fast (10mins), the stress minimal and post-op complications nil. The pups are fully recovered and playing/eating within a few hours.

So to summarise:

1. This is a quick, safe, humane procedure with minimal complications.
2. A very small percentage of female Doodles spayed at 8 weeks will develop urinary incontinence (even then, not always associated with spaying).
3. Incontinence is a minor inconvenience but is easily and cheaply treated with a very high degree of success.
4. Our research indicates that spaying at 8 weeks has reduced the incidence of mammary neoplasia to zero. Mammary cancers, unlike USMIs are not quick, cheap or easy to treat, and the percentage of favourable outcomes, even after chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery, is poor.

The choice for me as the Veterinary Surgeon was to balance an easily treated, minor nuisance, against a horrible, invasive, metastatic cancer. As they say, it's a no brainer.

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