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Mismating in dogs

Bitches usually come into season every 6 months, although the exact cycle length can vary between dogs. A season usually begins with approximately 10 days of bleeding, after which the bitch is willing to be mated and can become pregnant. Most bitches are at their most fertile 10-14 days after the first day of bleeding, but because all dogs are different you should assume that your bitch is at risk of becoming pregnant at any time during the **three weeks** from the first day of bleeding.

I have an entire bitch and dog in the same house - what should I do when my bitch comes into season?

If you do not wish to breed from your bitch we would always recommend spaying your bitch so that this situation does not arise. If you do wish to breed from your bitch in the future, but do not want to breed from your male dog, it would be sensible to castrate the male dog at least 6 weeks before your bitch is likely to come into season.

If you do not want to or are unable to neuter either your female or male dog, then we would strongly recommend that you make alternative living arrangements for your male dog during the three week period that your bitch is in season. This could be a boarding kennels or living with a friend. It is not a good idea to keep both in the same house and try to keep the two apart. Dogs will have a very strong desire to mate and may knock down baby gates and open doors to get to each other. Even if the dogs physically cannot reach each other, male dogs can become very frustrated and distressed if they are close to a bitch in season but cannot mate - this can result in howling, loss of appetite, urination inside the house and destructive behaviour.

Is it possible to delay my bitch's season?

Sometimes clients know that they want to breed from their bitch in the future, but not at the present time, and ask us to prescribe medication to delay the unwanted season. This may be to avoid unwanted mating in the home or because the dog is about to go to a show or competition or on holiday where being in season would be a nuisance.

Our recommendation is that you do not use medication to delay a season. The safest thing for your dog is to allow the season to happen and take precautions to keep the bitch safe at home so that she does not get mated accidentally. However, there is one licensed medical option for temporary delaying a season. This is an injection known as delvosteron.

To prevent seasons occurring the delvosteron injection is given before the bitch comes into season and is repeated every 3- 5 months to prevent future seasons (second injection after 3

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months, third injection 4 months later, then subsequent injections every 5 months). The injection takes around 5 days to work so needs to be given well before the season starts, (or can be given right at the start of a season as long as the bitch is kept isolated from male dogs for a week after the injection).

The disadvantages to using delvosteron are:

1. There is no guarantee that it will be successful, especially if there is any confusion regarding dates and timings. This could result in a false sense of security and an unwanted mating.
2. There is a risk of a womb infection developing after the injection, and this would be life-threatening and require urgent spaying and medical treatment to cure.
3. The product is not used often and the practice does not keep it in stock. This means that it has to be ordered in specially for individual patients. It usually takes 1-2 working days to order in a product and because the bottle has to be discarded after opening, we have to charge the whole bottle to the client even if only a small amount is required for an individual patient. The bottle of medication and vet administration costs around £212 (price correct as of January 2021).
4. It cannot be predicted when the seasons will come back once the injection is discontinued.

My bitch has been mated accidentally, what should I do now?

Sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, an unwanted mating will occur. The options are as follows:

1. Allow the pregnancy to go ahead - if the client is not unhappy about the prospect of puppies, the bitch is healthy enough for pregnancy and raising pups and it is expected that the puppies will be easy to find homes for.
2. Spay the bitch. If the client does not want to breed from the bitch in the future we would recommend an ultrasound scan 21 days after the unwanted mating. If an early pregnancy is confirmed, the bitch can be spayed at this point which will prevent progression of the pregnancy and prevent future pregnancy. It is a slightly bigger surgery to spay a dog that is in the early stages or pregnancy but this approach can guarantee that the pregnancy cannot continue and will prevent accidents in the future.

If the ultrasound scan is negative at 21 days we would repeat the scan a week later to make sure it really was negative and spaying could be arranged at the usual time of 3 months after the season if desired. A vet appointment and scan costs around £250 and spaying a bitch costs between £375 and £557 depending on size. Keyhole surgery is not an option when the bitch is pregnant.

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3. Hormonal injections to prevent or terminate unwanted pregnancy. A course of two injections, 24 hours apart can be given. This can be given at any time after the unwanted mating, up to 45 days after mating. It is more effective and less unpleasant for the dog when it is given within 21 days of mating. Possible side effects of the injection include vaginal discharge or passing of fetuses, depression, reduced appetite and swollen mammary tissue. Because the injections must be given 24 hours apart, we do not start the course on a Saturday.

The injection is expensive (£207-£555 for the course of two injections depending on the weight of the dog; prices correct as of January 2021). It is important not to allow any further mating after the injections have been given as the injections do not protect against future matings later in the season.

The bitch must then have an ultrasound scan 10 days after the injections to check that the injections have worked. The cost of a vet reassessment and ultrasound scan is around £264. If this scan is negative, it is repeated 2 weeks later to be absolutely sure that a pregnancy has not been missed. If the scan is positive, the course of injections and scans can be repeated again - this would incur the £207-£439 and the £264 charges again OR the bitch can be spayed.

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