

TIBETAN MASTIFF & THE RISK OF DESEXING (SPAYING/NUTERING)

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The Tibetan Mastiff (TM) is a majestic, intelligent, and independent breed, known for its protective instincts, thick coat, and strong-willed nature. Unlike many modern breeds, TMs have evolved in harsh climates and require careful management, especially when it comes to health-related decisions like desexing.



Effects of Desexing on Tibetan Mastiffs

Spaying (removal of ovaries/uterus in females) and neutering (removal of testicles in males) are common in many breeds. However, in Tibetan Mastiffs, desexing can have significant long-term effects—particularly when done at an early age (before full maturity).

1. Shedding Cycle Changes in Desexed Tibetan Mastiffs

Unlike intact Tibetan Mastiffs, whose shedding follows a seasonal pattern (spring and autumn coat blows), desexed TMs shed less frequently but in a more irregular and delayed manner.

- Shedding takes much longer, meaning a desexed TM may retain its full winter coat well into summer, leading to overheating.
- Conversely, they may finally shed the coat just before winter, making it harder for the body to adjust to seasonal temperature changes.
- This delayed shedding is due to hormonal imbalance after desexing, as testosterone and estrogen play a key role in regulating coat turnover.

Impact:

🔥 **Summer Discomfort:** Retaining a thick winter coat in warm weather can lead to overheating.

✳️ **Winter Coat Loss:** Shedding before winter means less insulation during colder months.

Solution:

- Increased grooming during warm months to manually remove excess undercoat.
 - Hydration & diet adjustments to promote natural coat turnover.
 - Avoid over-bathing as it can disrupt coat regulation.
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2. Coat Changes: "Spayed Coat Syndrome"

One of the most noticeable changes after desexing is in coat texture and quality.

- Tibetan Mastiffs naturally shed seasonally, maintaining a protective double coat.
- Hormonal regulation (estrogen and testosterone) influences the quality, shedding cycle, and structure of the coat.
- After desexing, many TMs develop a woolly, thick, and unmanageable coat that becomes prone to matting, tangling, and excessive shedding.
- The coat may lose its natural luster, become dry, or difficult to groom.

This is why many TM owners, particularly those who show their dogs or prefer an easier-to-maintain coat, opt to keep their dogs intact or choose alternative sterilization methods.

3. Growth & Joint Issues

Tibetan Mastiffs are a slow-maturing giant breed, taking up to 4–5 years to fully develop.

- Early desexing (before 24 months) can delay or disrupt growth plate closure, leading to longer, weaker bones and improper joint alignment.
- This significantly increases the risk of hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, arthritis, and ligament injuries.
- Research shows that neutered large-breed dogs are at a higher risk for ACL (cranial cruciate ligament) tears.

Recommendation:

- Avoid desexing before 24 months to allow proper musculoskeletal development.
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4. Increased Risk of Obesity

- Tibetan Mastiffs are naturally slow-metabolism dogs, often eating less than expected for their size.
- Desexed TMs have a reduced metabolic rate, meaning they require less food but are prone to weight gain.
- Obesity in large breeds worsens joint problems, increases diabetes risk, and reduces lifespan.

Proper diet and exercise management are essential if a TM is desexed.

5. Increased Risk of Certain Cancers

While desexing reduces the risk of mammary cancer (in females) and testicular cancer (in males), it increases the risk of other serious cancers, such as:

- Osteosarcoma (bone cancer) – More common in large-breed desexed dogs.
- Hemangiosarcoma (blood vessel cancer) – A deadly cancer affecting the spleen and heart.
- Lymphoma – Higher risk in desexed dogs.

Since TMs already have a naturally low cancer rate, some owners prefer to keep them intact to reduce these risks.

6. Increased Risk of Hormonal Imbalances (Hypothyroidism)

- TMs already have a predisposition to hypothyroidism, a condition that affects metabolism and coat health.
- Desexed dogs have a much higher risk of developing hypothyroidism, leading to symptoms like:
 - Weight gain
 - Lethargy
 - Hair thinning or excessive shedding
 - Dry, brittle coat

Regular thyroid function monitoring is recommended for desexed Tibetan Mastiffs.

7. Behavioral Considerations

- **Males:** Neutering may reduce territorial aggression and roaming behaviors, but it does not change independent guarding instincts.
- **Females:** Spaying eliminates heat cycles but can sometimes lead to increased anxiety or fearfulness in certain dogs.

Desexing does NOT make a Tibetan Mastiff easier to train or less protective. Their temperament is largely genetic and environmental.

Alternative Sterilization Options

For owners concerned about the risks of traditional spaying/neutering but still wanting to prevent unwanted breeding, alternatives include:

1. Vasectomy (for males)

- Keeps testosterone levels intact, preserving coat, muscle mass, and joint health.
- Prevents reproduction while maintaining natural behaviors.

2. Ovary-Sparing Spay (OSS) (for females)

- Removes only the uterus, keeping ovaries and hormones intact.
- Prevents pregnancy while maintaining coat quality and health benefits.

Both options are less commonly offered but are ideal for maintaining natural health benefits while preventing reproduction.

Conclusion: Should You Desex a Tibetan Mastiff?

- **Best practice:** If desexing, wait until at least 2–3 years old to allow full physical and hormonal development.
- Consider hormone-sparing alternatives like vasectomy or OSS to maintain health benefits.
- Monitor diet, coat health, and thyroid function if desexed.