

## What is false pregnancy?

False pregnancy is a very common condition affecting entire non-pregnant female dogs. It usually occurs two to three months after the end of a season. It happens as a result of an increase in levels of the hormone prolactin which stimulates milk production. It is a “normal” physiological change that is a very useful attribute in wild dogs living in a pack as it enables non-pregnant bitches to produce milk and assist with feeding the packs puppies.

## What signs should I look out for?

- Enlargement of the mammary glands
- Milk production
- Swollen abdomen
- Increase in maternal behaviour - nesting, nursing and/or guarding inanimate objects as if they were puppies

## Does false pregnancy cause any harm?

Most of the time affected bitches show no adverse symptoms at all, or may only show mild maternal behavioural changes which don't bother you as the owner.

However, if the mammary glands swell markedly they may become painful and there may be an increased risk of developing mastitis which can be very uncomfortable and require treatment with antibiotics and/or pain relief. Behaviour changes can lead to loss of appetite and in some cases guarding behaviour may become very aggressive.

A recent study of nearly 300 bitches has also shown that there may be a relationship between developing mammary tumours and being affected by false pregnancy (70% of bitches developing mammary tumours had a history of having being affected by a false pregnancy).

Mammary tumours are the second most common type of tumour found in dogs and prolactin has been linked directly with the growth and transformation of cancerous tissue and the development of mammary tumours. Prolonged distension of the mammary glands during false pregnancy can lead to stagnation of milk and lead to local production of carcinogens within the tissues.

## Can false pregnancy be treated?

A false pregnancy will resolve with time, but the condition can be effectively treated to relieve suffering and quickly return your pet back to her normal self. Current medical knowledge suggests that without medical treatment you may be increasing the risks of your pet developing mammary cancer in the future. Treatment includes:

- **Conservative treatment:**
  - Remove any inanimate objects that she is nursing to avoid reinforcing her heightened maternal behaviour.
  - Prevent her licking and therefore stimulating her mammary glands which can cause further prolactin release and continuation of clinical signs. This can be done using an Elizabethan Collar or body coat (both available from reception).
  - Increase exercise levels.

- **Medical treatment:**

The use of a drug to inhibit prolactin production is highly effective and will quickly reduce the behavioural and physical signs associated with false pregnancy. We commonly use an oral preparation which is easy to administer at home and is non-hormonal, but there is also a depot hormone injection available which may be beneficial in some situations.

One course of treatment, usually lasting four to six days, costs approximately £75 for a 25kg bitch. Occasionally bitches with severe symptoms require a second treatment.

## How do I prevent this condition in the future?

The best way to prevent this condition in the long term is to have your bitch neutered. If a bitch has experienced a false pregnancy then she is highly susceptible to developing the condition after each season and symptoms can get progressively worse each time.

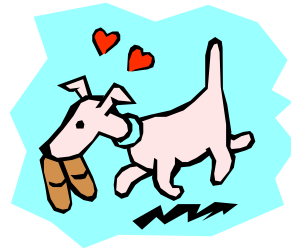
If you plan to breed from your bitch then you will need to discuss medical treatments to suppress heat, until such time as you are ready for her to have a litter, with your veterinary surgeon.

## Should a bitch with false pregnancy be treated before spaying her?

It is important that any behavioural or physical symptoms of false pregnancy are resolved before the neutering operation or the problems may persist and be difficult to resolve. We check every bitch for subtle signs of false pregnancy on the day of her neutering operation so that we can advise you about treatment and postponement of surgery as appropriate for your pet.

*Please do not hesitate to speak to one of our staff if we can be of further help or to make an appointment.*

*We reserve the right to change prices without notice, so please confirm at reception that any prices shown are current.*



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## Quick Reference Guide



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