



Study in dogs reveals ovaries' role in longevity

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Anne Marie Tiernon/Eyewitness News

West Lafayette - There are new clues about why some of us live longer than others. A new study of dogs has revealed a new role for the ovaries.

Ovaries produce eggs and hormones and also have a primary role in bearing children. But the study in West Lafayette points to a larger ovarian ecology, meaning the ovaries have a role in how long we live.

Kona, a 13-year-old Rottweiler from Cleveland, has achieved exceptional longevity for her breed. Most live about nine years. Data about Kona and 304 other Rottweilers was collected and analyzed at the Gerald P. Murphy Cancer Foundation.

"We are trying to find ways to promote exceptional longevity in pets and people," said Dr. David Waters, DVM PhD. director of the Exceptional Living Studies Center.

Researchers at the Purdue Research Park combed over the dog data and found a link between ovaries and a long life.

"To reach exceptional longevity is to live about 30 percent longer, similar to the difference between a 100-year-old person and a person that would only live, let's say, 72 years," Dr. Waters said. So we are talking about a big difference and that keeping ovaries longer was associated with an increased likelihood of reaching exceptional longevity."

Being a female, Kona was born with a 2-to-1 advantage over male dogs to reach her 13th birthday.

"But the interesting part was when we take a look at the dogs who lose their ovaries, the females who lose their ovaries in the first four years, now the female survival advantage disappears," Dr. Waters said.

But what does it mean for women?

Dr. Waters says his findings have similarities to those in two other studies published in the last six months - one in mice, one in human females.

"If you look at the data from the William Parker study with the 29,000 nurses, his data would suggest that women who keep their ovaries at least 50 years are the women who live longer," he said.

The takeaway from these studies, including the one with Kona? That doctors and women will pause and question the routine removal of ovaries during a hysterectomy. In the United States, the standard practice for decades has been to remove the ovaries during a hysterectomy to prevent ovarian cancer and maybe some breast cancers that are estrogen-fed.

The findings are something new to add to your plus and minus columns when making a decision with your doctor.

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