

DEBARKING DOGS

By: Dr. Douglas R. Yearout
All Animal and Bird Clinic
Everett, Washington, USA
www.holisticanimaldoc.com
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Another subject in the main, cripple and modify our pet department is canine debarking procedures. As we all know, dogs were endowed with a wonderful, and exasperating vocal language called the bark. There are little barks, yappy barks, big full-bodied barks, medium baby bear barks, happy greet you barks, anxious boredom barks, obsessive lonely barks, hyperactive on alert barks, and barking just to hear themselves bark barks. Just about any bark you don't want to hear is available, and you don't even have to ask. There are many ways to decrease or prevent unwanted barking, and it always starts with good obedience training. A well-trained dog will almost always follow a no bark order. You do though have to pay more attention to the dogs so that they will reward you with less barking. There are training collars (formerly called shock collars) that can help train the dog to reduce unwanted barking. At times we need to be paying attention to these barks, and the reason the dog is trying to tell us something. One of dog's greatest gifts to us is their uncanny ability to try to protect our life, limb, and property. My friend Parker, just the other day heard his dog Betsy barking late at night. He hollered out for her to shut up while the young crooks continued to remove two CD stereo players and a radar detector from his car and truck right out in front of his house in his own driveway. Would he have only heeded the warning, the perps would have been caught red handed and he would have saved himself a lot of hassle. Finally, don't forget Lassie. Without her expressive vocalization what would Timmy have done?

This brings up the original intent of this article. There are some folks who have just battled the bark long enough. Hopefully, they have tried every avenue to reduce unwanted barking, and at long last the debarking surgery is sought out at their vet's office. Well at least they want to keep the dog. We should never take this procedure lightly, as once it is done, it is permanent for the life of the dog. Normally, when any surgery is performed, and the dog is anesthetized, a tracheal tube is placed in the airway. The safer gas anesthetics can be administered thru this tube. With debarking surgeries, the tube would be in the way of the surgeon, so no gas anesthesia, and only injectable drugs can be used for this surgery.

The debark removes the vocal cords from the airway opening in the larynx or voice box. The larynx is a hard structure that we can feel in the front of the upper neck. It is right where the so called Adam's apple is situated. The vocal chords are composed of two fibrous folds of tissue, one on either side of the airway. The vocal cords vibrate or hum when air is passed over them. Put your fingers on your throat and hum a tune and you will feel the vibration right where the voice box is located.

The bark in the dog is a forceful rush of air pumped out from the chest and flows across these vocal cords. A very long instrument with grasping, cutting edges is used to completely remove the vocal cords. There can be a lot of bleeding, and damage to nerves in the area is possible which can make it difficult to breathe properly or swallow later on.

If this damage occurs the breath will be noisy or raspy on the inspiration (taking the breath in). The dog could become a so called roarer because of the noise made while breathing. It is even noisier when running and panting. Difficulty swallowing may cause the dog to choke on food, water, or saliva. All in all it's a pretty messy procedure fraught with too much potential for disaster. Even after recovery the dog will still try to bark as often as before, but it will just be this muffled, other worldly sounding noise. The only good thing learned from this surgery is that when a dog actually does have a roaring respiration from a condition or disease called paralyzed larynx (or laryngeal hemiplegia), the paralyzed vocal cords can be removed surgically to give the dog more room to breathe. This is the only time that this type of invasive surgery should be used to help sick dogs and not to modify healthy ones. If you are looking for a good non-barking dog you can always consider a Basenji who doesn't bark at all. Just take a good look at the Basenji Starr on Dr. Doug's lap.

As we keep harping week after week good behavioral counseling, and homeopathy can perform wonders in many dogs previously thought to be unchangeable in the excessive barking department. It's always better to keep trying these things before resorting to surgery to fix a dog who isn't broken in the first place.