

## CANINE TAIL DOCKING AND EAR CROPPING

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Previously, we covered feline declawing. Related to this, and continuing in the realm of cosmetic surgeries, a few words should be said about canine tail docking, and ear cropping.

When certain breeds were developed, way back then, the original breeders had intentions for dogs to perform certain jobs, or fulfill a function or a need within our society. That function or job determined the size or shape of the dog, floppy or erect eared, short or long tailed. Over the years, breeder associations and groups like the American Kennel Club (AKC) have modified and made standards for certain breed characteristics. These standards have to do with the original function of the breed, but they also include whether ears should be cropped or tails docked. These standards are written in stone and dogs may not be shown in the ring without these modifications. There is seldom a need in that breed to be lacking a tail, or have pointed ears to perform its original function. The cosmetic surgeries are just performed because that's the way that the breed ought to look like. There are some breeds like corgis, bulldogs and cattedogs, who have been bred to grow short or stunted tails without surgery, but for the majority, it's off to the vets. Some breeders will even remove their own puppies tails, and dewclaws (the floating thumb) and most don't do them very well. The scars are large, unsightly, and the cosmetic appearance is not as it should be. Recently, groups in more progressive and vocal states like California, and throughout Europe, have placed certain bans or limitations on the requirement to do these unnecessary cosmetic surgeries. The AKC still holds on to its standards in America, and the pendulum will not swing in favor of a more humane approach any time soon. Puppies and certain adult dogs go thru excruciating and unnecessary pain in our opinion. To justify doing these surgeries just because we want to see pointed ears or shorter tails, or to show the dog is not a good enough reason to put them through the discomfort.

Ear crops convert a floppy eared dog like a cocker spaniel into a pointed eared dog like the German shepherd. The puppy is anesthetized and the entire back and upper part of the ear is removed with heavy scissors or a sharp blade. There is a tremendous amount of bleeding. Sutures are placed and the ears are splinted for many weeks, while the ears heal in their new upright position. There are many bandage changes during those weeks, lots of fussing, head shaking, and discomfort during the healing time. It is becoming difficult to find a good cosmetic surgeon these days to do good looking ear crops which we see as fortunate, and another good reason to stop doing them.

Tail docks are the amputation of a part of, or the entire tail. This is no different than removing a finger or a limb. The tail is an active extension of the spine. It is composed of

muscle, bone, ligament and nerves. The nerves are the final end point of the spinal cord root. Many dogs suffer phantom stump pains in the tip of the healed amputated tail dock. These pains can be maddening and cause the dog lots of discomfort, even months and years past the time when the tail stump appears to have fully healed. If these surgeries are done, we advocate the use of the homeopathic remedy Hypericum to greatly reduce the level of pain post operatively, and for the phantom stump pain. This medicine is very effective and more surgeons should use it.

The dog uses its tail as a balance organ. They use it to communicate signals to us and to other animals. There are happy wags, alert-attentive tails held on high, hair-flared tail held straight in threats, and tails tucked between the legs in submission. The tail is so very useful to them, and why would we be so arrogant as to remove it? We think dobermans and boxers with ears and tails are very beautiful animals indeed, and with all their original parts intact. Consider not doing these surgeries, save the dogs from a lot of agony and enjoy them the way they are.