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Ear Cropping and Tail Docking

Ear cropping and tail docking are surgical procedures involving partial amputation of the animal's tail or ears, usually to achieve a desired cosmetic effect. Tail docking can be done by either incising through the tail with a pair of scissors or scalpel blade, or cutting off blood supply to the tail with a ligature until the tail falls off a few days later. The procedure is usually done around 3-5 days of age without the use of anesthetic. Ear cropping involves partial removal of the ear pinna, usually combined with bandaging and support splinting postoperatively, in order to get them to stand erect.

Nowadays, the practices of ear cropping and tail docking are almost entirely done for cosmetic reasons. One of the main reasons involves the breed standards required for some dogs to participate in show rings, such as those sponsored by the American Kennel Club; however, the practice originally had more practical reasons. Certain breeds of hunting and herding dogs could collect foxtails and burrs in their tails causing pain and infection. Others could collect feces in their tails leading to hygiene issues. Hunting dogs could injure their tails and ears while running through dense vegetation after prey. Long tails and ears were a vulnerable spot for fighting dogs. Cropped ears in a guard dog tend to make them look fiercer. Recently, the practice of ear cropping and tail docking has become very controversial.

Animal rights groups and many veterinary associations, including the AVMA and AAHA, have spoken out against the practice of these forms of cosmetic surgery. Every surgical procedure has potential complications, and the practice of ear cropping and tail docking are no different. There are inherent risks of anesthesia, hemorrhage, and infection with no added health benefit resulting from these procedures. Unnecessary pain is also a likely result of cosmetic surgery. Some owners even report evidence of phantom pain that can last for many years.

Proponents of ear cropping and tail docking typically base their argument around history and tradition. Many, including the AKC, have argued that cropped ears decrease ear infections by increasing air circulation. However, the AVMA has stated that there is little scientific evidence for this. Another argument is that owners and veterinarians should be making this sort of decision, not the government. Finally, it is argued that if licensed veterinarians are no longer allowed to perform such procedures, owners and breeders will turn to less-qualified sources, thus significantly increasing the above mentioned risks inherent in any surgical procedure.

I have a strong belief that ear cropping and tail docking should not be allowed for cosmetic reasons. Any type of surgical procedure should, in my opinion, either be based on the welfare of the patient, the welfare of society and companion animals in general (i.e. surgical sterilization), or in certain cases where the alternative could involve animal abandonment. Ear cropping and tail docking do not fall under any of these categories and the inherent risks and complications involved with the procedures make them completely unacceptable. Just because these practices have historical traditions do not warrant their continued acceptance, especially when negative side effects exist. I agree with the

AKC's point that owners and breeders may turn to unqualified sources for cosmetic surgery if veterinarians are no longer allowed to perform them. Therefore, instead of banning the procedures outright, the breed standards for dog shows and competitions must be changed by either no longer requiring cropped ears and docked tails, or by banning dogs with such features from competing as is now the case in the UK. Removing the source of demand is the quickest way to end this outdated practice.

References

American Kennel Club

http://www.akc.org/news/index.cfm?article_id=2787

AVMA

<http://www.avma.org/onlnews/javma/dec08/081215c.asp>

Wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docking_\(dog\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docking_(dog))