

## Dog Ear Cropping

**Owners should make an informed decision before cropping a dog's ears.**

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Ear cropping, like tail docking and dew claw removal, began centuries ago as a preventive measure. In those times, there were no antibiotics for infections or anesthetics, and no veterinary surgeons to repair cuts, wounds and infections. Owners learned as a practical matter to remove in the first days of life those portions of a puppy's anatomy that were prone to tearing.

Hunting dogs, which wag their tails vigorously when on scent, had their tails shortened. Dew claws, which can snag and tear in heavy brush, were removed. Ears were an easy target in fights, and most of the fighting dogs had their ears cropped. Thus, breeds like American Staffordshire Terriers and Bull Terriers were cropped. (Bull Terrier breeders, however, stopped cropping almost a century ago and learned to select dogs for breeding with a small, erect ear.) Some hunting and guarding breeds, including the Great Dane (at that time a boarhound) and the Boxer, were cropped to prevent injury. Many flockguarding breeds (such as the Caucasian Owtcharka of Russia and the Akbash Dog of Turkey) had their ears nearly amputated (across, almost flush with the head) since they lived most of their lives out with the flocks and had to face wolves and bears. Even the Saluki had its ears removed in its native Arabia, probably due to the rapid appearance of flies and maggots in any wound. Many early Saluki imports from the desert could not be shown in the United States due to their cropped ears.

Almost all early ear crops were short and crude. As advances in husbandry and medicine eliminated the need for short ears, cropping became more fashion than protective medicine. Surgeries were done under anesthesia, and the cuts tended to lengthen and become more graceful and aesthetic in shape. Miniaturized breeds, such as the Miniature Pinscher and the Miniature Schnauzer, usually followed their larger cousins in fashion. Toy Manchester Terrier breeders, however, resisted and do not allow cropping, although it is permitted for the Standard Manchester Terrier.

There are no longer any scientifically proven reasons to crop ears. Some say that it prevents ear infections, but veterinarians see plenty of erect-eared dogs (both natural and cropped) with these infections. Besides, if that were true, the practice of cropping Cocker Spaniels and other spaniels as well as Poodles, Beardies and Mastiffs would have gained wide acceptance.

Today, ear cropping is a cosmetic surgery, pure and simple. If you like the look of the cropped ear, you may choose to crop, but it is a choice. The procedure should be done as early as possible: 6 weeks of age in the larger breeds and not past 9 weeks in the smaller ones. In a dog older than 16 weeks there is not only more pain but also more pain memory. Ear cartilage is for the most part set permanently by 4 months of age, so there is little latitude for bracing and training the cut ear to stand after surgery. Ear cropping is a choice each owner must make, and it should be an informed choice.