

Ear Cropping and Tail Docking

Cropping your dog's ears and docking his tails is controversial.

Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I just received Sadie, an 8-week-old Schnauzer puppy. I have the decision of whether or not to crop her ears. What you would suggest in finding the right doctor to do the job?

A. The questions regarding ear cropping and tail docking in dogs is a controversial one, especially among veterinarians. It has been compared to cosmetic surgery in humans, but without the consent of the patient. In the past, pain management has been minimal and numerous procedures have been botched, leading to bleeding and other complications.

The ethical dilemma of whether or not to have your dog's ears cropped ultimately will be yours to sort out. There is no medical benefit to cropping your dog's ears (or docking its tail). However, if you decide to have Sadie's ears docked, please follow the following guidelines:

1. Insist on using a veterinarian who is highly experienced with the procedure, with a long list of references.
2. Insist on thorough pain management, including pre-emptive analgesia, intra-operative analgesia and postoperative pain control. Pre-emptive analgesia is the use of pain medication before surgery to prevent the onset of pain. Intra-operative analgesia involves the use of anesthetic agents that help control pain. Some anesthetics have no effect on pain control. Finally, post-operative pain medication includes a combination of injections and oral medications that control pain and swelling until the ears are fully healed. Ask the veterinarian what his or her pain management plan is for the surgery, and if it does not address all three aspects of pain control, go somewhere else.

Best,
Jon Geller, DVM

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