



Literature Review on the Welfare Implications of
Ear Cropping-Dogs
(March 13, 2013)

THE ISSUE

Some breeds of dogs in the United States customarily have their ears reduced with a blade or scissors to modify their shape and, in some cases, allow a naturally drooping ear to stand upright. Cropping is performed when dogs are between 6 and 12 weeks old depending on breed and body condition. In larger breeds, after surgery the ears are positioned with tape, bandages or other devices to encourage an upright position.^{1,2,3} Well-controlled studies addressing the animal welfare implications of cropping dogs' ears do not exist. However case studies support certain risks associated with the procedure.

WELFARE CONCERNS—RISKS

General anesthesia—Cropping should always be carried out under full anesthesia, which itself has associated risks.⁴

Postoperative Care—Dogs will experience some discomfort during healing, stretching, re-taping and bandaging, and other manipulations after surgery. Some will need their ears bandaged or taped upright for days to months, and they may be isolated from other dogs during this period.

Potential Complications—As for any incision, cropped ears may become infected. Cropped ears may also fail to stand or have a distorted shape or position potentially leading to subsequent operations.^{5,6,7}

REASONS GIVEN FOR THE PRACTICE

Animal Benefits—It has been suggested that dogs with cropped ears are less likely to suffer from infections of the ear canal. Although the development of some serious infections has been linked to the presence of a heavy hanging ear⁸, there is no evidence that cropping prevents or successfully treats these infections. It has also been suggested that cropping avoids later ear injury⁹ or improves hearing, but no evidence is available to substantiate these claims either.

Human Benefits—Ear cropping produces an alert expression in dogs used for security or guard work and may contribute to the distinctive appearance of a pedigree breed.¹⁰

LEGISLATION AND ACCEPTABILITY

The American Kennel Club supports owners who choose to crop: “...*ear cropping, tail docking, and dewclaw removal, as described in certain breed standards, are acceptable practices integral to defining and preserving breed character and/or enhancing good health.*”¹¹ However, dogs with cropped ears may not compete in United Kingdom Kennel Club events.¹²

Many veterinary organizations, in addition to the AVMA, oppose cosmetic cropping including the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA),¹³ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association

This peer-reviewed summary has been prepared by the American Veterinary Medical Association Animal Welfare Division. While principally a review of the scientific literature, it may also include information gleaned from proprietary data, legislative and regulatory review, market conditions, and scholarly ethical assessments. It is provided as information and its contents should not be construed as official AVMA policy. Mention of trade names, products, commercial practices or organizations does not imply endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

(CVMA)¹⁴ and Australian Veterinary Association.¹⁵ Individual veterinarians differ in their perspectives (e.g., letters^{9,16,17,18}).

Cropping has been deemed unacceptable in the United Kingdom for more than a century¹⁹ and is currently prohibited in Australasia and most European and Scandinavian countries.

SUMMARY

Ear cropping is a cosmetic procedure with potential negative outcomes for the animal.

REFERENCES

1. Jensen HE. Ear Trimming. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1950;116:428-31.
2. Leonard HC. Ear Cropping by Triangulation. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1958;133:108-10.
3. Hancock WB. Ear-cropping Technic. *Vet Med Small Anim Clin* 1968;63:860-865.
4. Brodbelt D. Perioperative mortality in small animal anaesthesia. *Vet J*. 2009;182:152-61
5. Vine LL. Corrective ear surgery. *Vet Med Small Anim Clin* 1974;69:1014-1020.
6. Sauer BW. Correction of faulty ear carriage in the dog with porous polyethylene implants. *Vet Med Small Anim Clin*. 1976;71:1071-1075.
7. Burns CC. Surgical technique for correcting ear trims. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1951;118:93-5.
8. Harvey C. Ear canal disease in the dog: medical and surgical management. *J Am Vet Med Ass* 1980;177:136-139.
9. Jacobs FS. Ear trimming in dogs [letter] *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1990;196:679-680.
10. Stone RW. More on ear cropping and neutering [letter] *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2000;216:174.
11. American Kennel Club. Government relations Position Statements: http://images.akc.org/pdf/canine_legislation/position_statements/Ear_Cropping_Tail_Docking_and_Dewclaw_Removal.pdf Accessed February 4, 2013
12. The Kennel Club. Competing with docked or cropped dogs in the UK. Available at: <http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/item/979> . Accessed February 4, 2013.
13. AHAA Reference detail. Ear Cropping/Tail Docking Position Statement. Available at: <https://www.aahanet.org/Library/CropDock.aspx> Accessed February 4, 2013.
14. CVMA Policy on Ear Cropping and Tail Docking of Dogs. Available at: <http://www.cvma.net/doc.asp?id=21252> Accessed February 4, 2013
15. Australian Veterinary Association, Surgical alteration to the natural state of animals. Available at: <http://www.ava.com.au/policy/31-surgical-alteration-natural-state-animals> Accessed February 4, 2013
16. Longair JA. A plea against ear cropping [letter] *Can Vet J* 1980;21:280.
17. Humble JA. More comments on letters about JAVMA cover art [letter] *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2002;221:1382
18. Connell DL. More comments on letters about JAVMA cover art [letter] *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2002;221:1382.
19. Hobday FTG. *Surgical Diseases of the Dog and Cat* 1906; Baillière, Tindall and Cox: London