



# Vet 4 Petz

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## Pet Health: Cosmetic Surgery

Many times veterinarians are requested to perform these types of surgeries on our pets for various personal and other reasons. Whether controversial or not, the procedures continue to be performed. In some cases these procedures are necessary, and in some cases other alternatives may be chosen.

To learn more about each of these procedures, and for possible alternative treatments, click below on the procedure of interest.

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### Declawing Your Cat

Declawing is generally only performed on the cat. The surgery involves general anesthesia. The cat's claw is actually the third section of their digit or toe, and it is this that is removed.

Preferably done on young cats less than 6 months of age, cats of any age can be declawed. Recovery is typically longer in older cats. Infection and regrowth of the claw are the most common complications of the procedure. Cats with rear claws left intact, can still climb trees. Declawed cats however, should be kept strictly indoors for their own safety.

Why declaw your cat is a common question, and one of much controversy. Some people feel very strongly against this procedure, and for personal reasons would choose not to do so. Cats that scratch furniture or people inadvertently, require something done to prevent the damage caused by these cats. What other options are there?

Clipping the nails on your cat is one way to prevent the sharp hook-like nail from causing much damage. Cat's nails tend to require clipping every 6-8 weeks depending upon their rate of growth. Another option available, involves placing a plastic sleeve over each individual claw, using a product known as soft paws. This product, available for both dogs and cats, uses a plastic sleeve shaped much like the claw, and comes in different sizes.

The sleeves are individually glued to the claw much like false nails on humans. Difficulties arise when the animal begins to chew at the covering over the claw. This tends to occur more often than not, resulting in removal of the sleeve by the pet prematurely. Manufacturer suggests soft paws be replaced every one - two months or so. Yet many cats manage to have them off within days to weeks.

A third option available for cats is another surgical procedure, in which the claw is spared, but the tendon which causes it to come out of its sheath, is severed. Thus the claw can no longer function by extending outside of the sheath. The downside to this procedure is that the nails still require clipping, for as they grow, they extend outside of the sheath, and therefore can still do damage by scratching.

Managing the cat which uses its claws to cause damage, can be a difficult decision to make. Consult with your veterinarian on which choice may be right for you, and your cat.

## ***Cropping Your Dog's Ears***

Ear cropping is done on a select group of dogs for cosmetic purposes only. Boxers, Great Danes, Doberman Pincers, Miniature Pincers, Schnauzers, Bouviers des Flandres, and American Pit Bull Terriers, are among the more common breeds in which ear cropping is performed.

Usually recommended to be done around the age of 10-14 weeks old, the procedure requires full anesthesia. The ears are then cut in a way that instead of flopping down to the side of the head, they stand erect on the head to a point.

In most breeds however, the ears require a period of bandaging and support splinting in order to get them to stand. This is essential for the ears to ultimately stand, and if not done sufficiently, the ears may not stand erect. The longer the ear length is, the more time required for splinting is necessary.

Although breeders can perform this procedure, it is best left to a licensed veterinarian, who has appropriate anesthetics. Puppies who undergo this procedure expect at least a few weeks of painful, sensitive ears. Unfortunately, the splinting of the ears is necessary especially during the early stages of healing, which adds to their discomfort. Unless you're planning to show your dog in conformation classes, ear cropping is un-necessary, and therefore becomes personal preference.

Be sure and understand all that is involved not only with the surgery, but afterwards during the splinting procedures. Know what to expect, and when to seek help during this time from your veterinarian, to avoid ears that ultimately won't stand.

The Association of Veterinary Medicine (AVMA), has recently made a statement regarding cosmetic ear cropping and tail docking in the dog. Essentially, and ultimately the AVMA would like to see this type of cosmetic procedure discontinued for cosmetic purposes only.

## ***Debarking Your Dog***

### **NEW CONTROVERSY OVER DEBARKING**

Recently, the New Jersey state senate has unanimously taken the stance that debarking surgery for the dog is inhumane. This proposal is now in the senate for vote, and if it goes through, debarking of dogs will be illegal in the state of New Jersey. Penalties for owners or veterinarians caught performing this procedure will include fines as well as prison time.

This proposal is controversial with the owners of dogs known to have barking behavioral problems, as well as with veterinarians who perform this procedure.

Technically, the procedure removes the folds of tissue in the larynx responsible for sound production. Most dogs following the procedure retain some audible sound, but it is muted much like a whisper. The amount of tissue removed from these cases is less involved than that of a tonsilectomy. Most dogs recover uneventfully; some require medication to reduce post operative swelling, and some develop scar tissue enough to allow the bark to return.

**Vet4Petz** would like to know how you feel about this issue. Please use [Questions for the Vet](#) to let us know your opinion.

This procedure involves the removal of 2 folds of tissue located on either side of the larynx or voice box in the dog. The so called vocal folds actually function to come together in order for the dog to make an audible sound with pitch.

When removed, the sound made by the dog is much like that of a whisper or a bark heard from far away when the dog is right next to you. The effect of debarking can be explained much like an individual trying to whistle

while the lips are apart. In order for sound to occur, air must travel through a narrow opening in either the voice box for a bark, or the lips for a whistle to occur.

Most cases of owners requesting their dogs to be debarked are in locations where disturbing the neighborhood becomes a problem. In some cases, household disruption occurs as some dogs refuse to pay attention to owners wishes for them to cease the barking.

Other alternatives to surgery are available. These include electronic devices worn about the dog's neck which emit an electric shock (much like that of a static shock) when barking occurs. Remote collars are activated by the owner. Self activated collars do not depend upon the owner's presence, and are activated ideally by the dog's bark. However, in some cases, these self activating collars can discharge for reasons other than barking, which can confuse and serve to de-spirit the dog.

Other collars can be worn which emit scents such as citronella when the dog barks. These collars are preferred over the electric devices, in that the startle response is achieved in a less harmful process.

Sometimes, if the barking is only a problem when the owner is present, using external devices to startle will work. A favorite device used for purposes of startle, is simply a can of coins that is shook sharply toward the dog when the undesirable barking occurs. This serves to divert the dog's attention toward the can of coins, and away from the barking stimulus.

Choose wisely and smartly for your dog if barking is a problem. Remember, if you live alone, or are away from the house for periods of time, a barking dog can thwart a potential robber from breaking and entering your home. If complaints are occurring from your neighbors however, common courtesy should direct you to take appropriate action to ensure peace and quiet in the neighborhood.

### ***Docking Your Dog's Tail***

This procedure is typically done on puppies between 3 and 5 days of age. No anesthetic is involved, and the tails are docked to an appropriate length for the breed. Some of the breeds normally docked include the Rottweiler, Doberman pincer, Boxer, Schnauzer, Miniature pincer, Toy Fox Terrier (amongst other terrier breeds), Corgi, Poodle, and Schipperke to name a few.

This procedure is much preferred done while the puppies are less than a week of age. Afterwards, the puppy has to wait until it is of age appropriate for anesthesia, which is much more involving a procedure, with a much longer healing process. There is also associated pain with the procedure when done on an older animal, and complications include bleeding, premature stitch removal by the dog, poor healing of the area, and more chances for scarring to occur.

Unless the dog is being utilized for show purposes in the conformation ring, tail docking is best left undone if beyond the age of 5-7 days.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has recently made a statement with regards to cosmetic tail docking in the dog. Essentially, and ultimately the AVMA would like to see this type of cosmetic procedure discontinued for cosmetic purposes only.

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