



Declawing

Declawing is most often performed on cats. It involves the removal of the last joint of the cat's toe, not just the claw. Cats walk on their toes (rather than the pads of their paws), using their claws for balancing, exercising, and stretching. They hook their claws into an object and stretch back and down to give their back and shoulder muscles a good workout. Cats use their claws to mark territory both visually and with scent. They catch prey with their claws. All these natural behaviors will be altered if a cat is declawed.

Following surgery, some cats become fearful as they may feel more vulnerable now that one of their primary means of defense is gone. As a result, they may hide or resort to biting. Their feet are tender so scratching in the litter box is painful. They may then use other objects as a litter box—like their owner's bed. Now that the cat can no longer mark territory with his or her claws, the cat may mark with other secretions—urine or feces.

Not only is it inhumane to declaw a cat, in some countries it is illegal. Some jurisdictions in the United States have outlawed the surgery as well.

What Can You Do?

- ❧ Accept your companion animals as they are—with claws and voices, floppy ears and tails.
- ❧ Consult with an animal behaviorist, your veterinarian, or the group from which you obtained your companion animal for help to curb undesirable behaviors.
- ❧ If you live in a location where a barking dog may become a nuisance, choose a dog that is inherently calm and quiet or postpone adoption until you can relocate to a more suitable residence.

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INHUMANE SURGERIES





Inhumane Surgeries

There are four elective surgeries that are inhumane and should be avoided unless they are medically justified. They are: declawing, debarking, ear cropping, and tail docking. Often, these surgeries are done because owners do not totally accept the basic appearance of cats and dogs or are unwilling to live with their pet's normal behaviors.

Tail Docking

Tail docking involves cutting off a dog's tail, which alters the dog's ability to communicate because tails are an expressive part of dogs. Certain breeds automatically have their tails docked to meet an arbitrary standard.

Tail docking is typically performed on 3 to 5-day-old puppies. No anesthesia is involved. A rubber band is placed over the base of the tail, cutting off the blood supply to the tail, which falls off within three days. Or, a veterinarian simply cuts the tail with surgical scissors. Usually no stitches are used. The process involves the severing of skin, nerve, cartilage, and bone. Complications of such a surgery are premature removal of stitches by the puppy, bleeding and scarring. Later in life, the dog may experience pain due to the formation of nerve scar tissue in the stump.



Debarking

Debarking involves removing tissue from the dog's vocal cords. A debarked dog still barks—just not as loudly.

The surgery is performed by accessing the larynx (voice box) through the animal's mouth or through an incision in the throat and then through the larynx. The removed tissue may grow back or scar tissue may develop blocking the throat. If either of these occurs, the dog has to undergo a second surgery. Bleeding and infection are other complications of this surgery. Another complication of the surgery, one not often thought of, is the new bark may be just as annoying as the old bark.

Dogs bark for any number of reasons. They alert us to an intruder—friend or foe. They bark to tell us they need to go outside or to ask for attention. They bark because they are bored or left alone for long periods of time. Debarking does not solve the underlying problem of why dogs bark. By cutting into their vocal cords, part of their ability to speak the way they want to is removed. This surgery is inhumane because it deprives dogs of a natural means of expression; it does not alter the environmental, psychological, or physical reasons why dogs bark excessively.



Ear Cropping

Altering a dog's ears changes the appearance of the dog. It also changes how the dog uses his or her ears, which are sometimes as active as tails when it comes to canine communication. Neither should be tampered with unless there is a medically sound reason to do so.

Ear cropping is typically done around 10 to 14 weeks of age under anesthesia. After that age, ear cropping is not recommended as the ear cartilage is less flexible. Tissue is cut away from the ears in such a way as to make them stand upright rather than flop down. To maintain that upright posture, the ears are taped to splints and then bandaged for a period of time. As with any surgery, problems can occur with ear cropping, such as infection, bleeding, pain and long-term ear sensitivity.

