

Canine Ear Trimming

By
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Many of today's veterinarians have refused to do canine ear trims even when requested to do so by a client. The reasons for refusal are many and varied. Most veterinarians were never taught the procedure while in school and have therefore never tried the surgery. Some veterinarians who know the procedure and have done ear trims still refuse to do them because of the extreme value of an animal or because they are afraid of the consequences of a bad ear trim. The dog with an ugly ear trim is very poor advertising for the surgical skill of a veterinarian.

There are very few fundamentals necessary for performing a beautiful ear trim. Before trying any ear trims one should become familiar with the ear trimming styles which are in vogue for each breed. This appreciation can be gained by attending dog shows or looking in the various dog magazines. It is also advisable to begin by trimming house dogs and pets rather than some valuable show dog. One should also be aware of state laws concerning ear trimming. At the present time, the state of Massachusetts prohibits ear trims on dogs.

A good ear trim should look natural on the dog, just as if it had grown that way. The ear should be free of scarring and should have smooth contours rather than jutting angles.

Before trimming the ears, the dog

should be given a thorough physical examination. It should be free of severe parasitism and infectious disease and be in a good state of nutrition. It is also important that the dog be at the proper age, as the ear gets "meaty" as the animal ages, and the cartilage is no longer growing.

The breeds of dogs in which ears are most often trimmed and the proper age for trimming are listed below.

1. Great Dane	8-10 weeks
2. Boxer	8-12 weeks
3. Doberman Pincher	8-12 weeks
4. Schnauzer	10-12 weeks
5. English Bull Terrier	2-6 months
6. Staffordshire	2-4 months
7. Brussels Griffon	2-3 months
8. Boston Terrier	5-8 months
9. Manchester Terrier	8 months

Preparation of Dog for Surgery

Ear trimming is done under general anesthesia. The dog should be given a suitable pre-anesthetic plus atropine. The barbiturates are the anesthetic of choice because gas anesthesia apparatus may interfere with proper movement of the head while the surgery is being performed. Place a pledget of cotton in each ear to keep the canal free of blood and disinfectant. The ears should be shaved on both sides with a straight edge razor. Wash the ears with soap and water, rinse, and disinfect with suitable disinfectant. Ether should be used to defat the ear so that proper marking can be done on the ear.

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Complete asepsis is difficult, but should be strived for.

Surgery

There are many methods of performing the actual surgery of ear trimming, and each veterinarian should choose the method that meets his personal preference. Some of the more popular methods are listed.

I. Free Hand Method

This method produces the finest jobs for those willing to take the time to perfect it. The dog is placed in sternal recumbency, and the ear is marked with a ball point pen along the proper lines for each breed. Using a straight scissors with short blades, start the cut at the base of the ear and extend to the tip along the ink lines. Push the loose skin of the ear towards the head, so that there will be sufficient skin to suture over the edge of the ear at the end. Hemorrhage should be controlled by twisting the bleeding vessels.

II. Jensen Ear Clamp

This is a long flat clamp with a slot in it through which a scalpel blade can pass, making the cut in a guillotine fashion. Differences in various parts of the ear will cause the ear to slip in the clamp.

III. MacAllan Ear Trimming Clamps

These clamps are made of different sizes and contours, a clamp being produced for most of the major breeds. These clamps must be used at the proper age, so that the clamp will fit the ear properly.

After the cut has been made, the ears should be compared to be sure that they are the same size. Pulling the ears into apposition over the top of the head will give a good observation of their relative size. Use a sharp scissors or a scalpel blade to trim any cartilage in order to make the ears match in size and shape. Also, trim the loose skin so that there is just enough skin to suture over the edge of the ear. The type of suture material to

be used is a matter of individual preference but nylon and stainless steel may be the materials of choice. A $\frac{3}{8}$ " curved No. 14 needle with a cutting edge is the best needle to use. Start the suturing $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the tip of the ear and continue towards the base. Suturing too close to the tip of the ear may cause the tip to slough. Using a continuous spiral pattern, carry the suture from inside to outside of the ear so that less of the loose skin on the back of the ear is drawn over the cut edge of the ear.

Each breed has its own special differences in length and width of the trimmed ear. Following is a partial list of the differences in some of the major breeds.

1. Great Dane

Cut the ear as long as possible but still allow for a proper stand. For proper width, cut as close to the posterior aspect of the tragus as possible, as this is the structure lending the most support to the ear. A long sweeping bell contour is desired, with the bell approximately 1- $\frac{1}{4}$ " lateral to the elbow of the posterior cornu of the antetragus. Make all measurements on the part of the ear that is to remain, as the ears of a dog are not always of the same size.

2. Doberman Pincher

Most veterinarians leave slightly less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the ear remaining. The Doberman is also cut with a slight bell contour, with the bell approximately $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the elbow of the posterior cornu.

3. Schnauzer

The ear is trimmed so that $\frac{2}{3}$ of the length is left. Most people prefer a straight cut from the posterior tragus to the point $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way up the length of the ear.

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oning of animals by pesticides, as well as careless or improper use of insecticides or herbicides, has resulted in quite high levels of these materials in animal feeds and resultant contamination of meat, milk, and eggs.

Varied and changing methods of harvest and storage may contribute to losses in energy value of animal foods, decrease in vitamin content, or toxicity due to mold growth. Aflatoxins (mold metabolites) growing in corn may be passed in small quantities in milk. The same is true of insecticides. Each class of these materials has members known to be carcinogenic to laboratory animals. These are but a few examples of the many ways livestock production and related industries may contaminate and degrade the environment of both animals and man.

It is obvious that, with certain limitations, animals and mankind inhabit the same environment. They breathe the same air, drink water from similar sources, and walk the same earth. As such, it is inevitable that both will be subjected to many of the same abuses. Man's physiological similarity to the higher animals means that at least some of his responses to the environment will be similar to those of the animals near him. Because animals generally have shorter life spans, long-term contamination and its effect on lifetime exposure and subsequent generations may be studied more rapidly. Thus, in livestock, wildlife, and pets, mankind has a valuable indicator of the havoc which he may be inviting upon himself. It behooves us, then, to watch carefully every effect upon other species which is attributable to environmental abuse. Numerous animal species are also necessary for research into the effects of environmental change upon life. As such, higher animals of many kinds are presently our best means of making approximations of the potential hazard to man.

In this total picture, every veterinarian should strive to appreciate the ecology and relationship of his patients to the environmental hazards which they may generate or receive. The agricultural veterinarian should not ignore the stream pollution re-

sulting from feedlot runoff; nor should the small animal physician in a metropolitan area practice without knowing, for example, something of the possible relationship of atmospheric sulfur dioxide to canine respiratory disease. The educator and researcher must direct their efforts toward increasing and disseminating knowledge of the vital issues of our survival and quality of life. We cannot afford the luxury of pursuing our own narrow interests without relevance to the greatest segment of the population.

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1. Boxer

Trim the ear so that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length is remaining. Boxers are cut with a slight bell contour, with the bell $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the elbow of the posterior cornu.

Post Operative Care of the Trimmed Ear

After the ears have been sutured, they can be taped tip to tip very loosely over the top of the head. Some veterinarians prefer to leave the ears completely alone for 2–3 days. After 2–3 days, the ears are fixed in the erect position by any one of a number of means. One method that is especially successful is to tape the ears to molded U-shaped splints which have been made of wire and covered with tape. The erect part of the splint should be slightly longer than the ear. The ear is taped loosely so that it literally hangs in the splint. The ear is left in the splint for 8–10 days.

Summary

If any practitioner is willing to spend the time in perfecting his skill at ear trimming, he will produce living monuments to his medical and surgical skill. By following these few guidelines and using critical observation and evaluation, he should have minimal difficulties in his ear trims.