The other function of a tail is to help the dog balance properly. Puppies with long tails are much more agile than ones with docked tails. It is easier for a dog with a long tail to climb, crawl and balance.



## What are the problems for dogs with docked tails?

The procedure to cut off the tails is painful and traumatic for the puppies especially when performed by untrained non-veterinarians. Just because they are small, does not mean that they do not feel pain. The cut goes through skin, muscles, nerves, blood vessels, bone and cartilage (soft bone). It is possible that they never forget this experience. If the docking is done poorly, there could be physical complications like problems with urinating and defaecating and nerve damage that causes pain later as the puppy grows up. Bleeding during tail docking can be severe and puppies can die as a result. Apart from the trauma when the tail is docked, dogs that have short tails encounter problems when meeting people or other dogs since they cannot use their tails to communicate and can also struggle to balance.

#### What can I do?

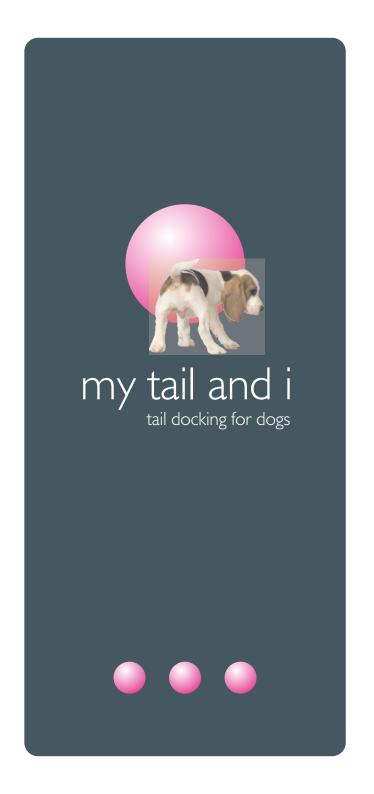
Next time you want to buy a puppy, insist on a puppy with a natural, long tail. As long as there are people willing to buy puppies with docked tails, irresponsible breeders will continue performing the procedure.

Insist on a tail, or cancel the sale.

If you know of a breeder who docks puppies' tails, report him/her to the nearest SPCA. You can also ask advice from the South African Veterinary Council at 012 342 1612 or info@savc.org.za.

### $\sim$ the end $\sim$





# Why do some dogs have long tails and some short tails?

Most puppies are born with long tails. Sometimes, very rarely, a puppy will be born with a short tail, for example some Corgis and Australian Cattle Dogs. Some breeds have naturally shorter but curly tails, for example the Bulldog.

Dogs that are born with long tails sometimes undergo tail docking. This means that their tail is cut off, usually at a few days of age. In the past, veterinarians did this, but currently vets are no longer allowed to dock dog tails. Since people still want dogs with short tails, some breeders do the tail docking themselves.





### Why do people dock puppies' tails?

The reason most people want their puppies' tails docked, is because they are used to seeing these dogs with short tails, for example, Boerboels, Dobermans and Jack Russell terriers. Some people who take part in dog shows, think that their dog will look silly with a long tail. In previous years people did it for reasons that do not currently apply, for example they paid less tax for dogs with docked tails (working dogs were exempt from taxes and had docked tails to make it easier for them to work in the thick bush) and they believed it would ward off rabies. Today, people have dogs mainly as companions and these reasons do not apply anymore.





### Why do dogs need tails?

Dogs use their tails to communicate with people and other dogs. When they are happy and want to be friends, they wag their tails wildly. When they are worried or scared, they wag their tails stiffly to say "back off, otherwise I'll bite you". Dogs use their tails to communicate, just like they use their facial expressions, lips, ears and body posture to communicate their feelings. If you can look at a dog's tail, you will know if it wants to be friends or wants to bite you. Dogs with long tails can communicate better, so they get involved in fewer fights with other dogs and are also less likely to bite people.

