

What is going on with those EARS?????????????
By Karen Priest, Traumhof German Shepherd Dogs



I regularly get emails and phone calls from puppy owners, panicked because the puppy's ears - which had been standing straight at attention for weeks- have now flopped over. Or, perhaps, one ear stands, but the other ear is down.. and the ears switch position daily! What's up with that???

Is this happening to your puppy right now? Are you searching for information because Fido woke from his nap with his ears suddenly down? Rest assured: this is NORMAL.

When puppies are whelped, their little ears are tight to their heads. They can't hear anything for the first couple weeks of their lives, and their eyes don't open until they are about 10 days old. As they grow, their ears go through stages. As young pups, the ears are not erect. Just when the ears spring up varies considerably. In one litter, a couple pups might have ears up at 5 weeks while littermates' ears remain down until 8-9 weeks. Sometimes the ears create a "triangle" over the head, where they tip to point together. Some pups have ears standing tall, but the tips wiggle as they move. This is all normal.

Once in a while I have a whole litter with ears up at 6- weeks. The puppies leave here looking like miniature German Shepherds... with tall ears- often looking far too big for their little heads.

As the puppies teethe, the ears will usually be all over the place; up, down, one up /one down, triangled. Some puppies' ears never drop while they teeth - but most pups' do. This is nothing to worry about. The ears can go up and down until the puppy is 6 months old.

If your puppy is 6 months old and his ears have NEVER stood, you need to start thinking about how important it is to you that his ears stand. If you will not be happy without erect ears, now is the time to be proactive and help those ears along.

There are many methods for fitting your puppy with ear forms (or the pink sponges from curlers) & gluing them in the pups ears with surgical glue or eyelash glue. You can ask your breeder or your vet to help you with this, or you can research it on the web. Do not attempt this with glues that might irritate your puppy's sensitive ear skin.

If you do glue or tape ears, you will need to keep the apparatus in place for two weeks. Then, you can remove it (if it hasn't come undone three times and just been replaced!) & see if the ears are now erect, or if you need to do it longer.

Urban legend has it that you can help your puppies ears to rise by providing him good hard chewie bones to exercise his jaw/face muscles and relieve his teething. I am not sure the chewie will make the ears go up faster; but your puppy will like the idea!

Some breeders tell me they massage the base of the ears daily and this helps ears stand. (I have never done this, and in fact, I usually prefer the ears themselves Not be touched a lot during this time. I also try to keep littermates from tugging on one another's ears!)

Ear Care

Your puppy's ears will also require some routine care, and inspection. It is a good idea to clean your puppy's ears periodically. Put some EpiOtic (my

favorite, but there are others) on a cotton ball, and swab your pup's ear. Remove any dirt, sand particles, brown waxy build up. If you find a lot of brown waxy discharge, especially if accompanied by a bad odor, redness, bloody scabs (from your dog itching his ears with his toenails), and/or heat: your puppy has an ear infection brewing. It might be yeast, or staph, or a number of other culprits and your dog will need to see your vet. You will need to clean the ears daily and apply medicated ear ointment a few times a day. If the vet finds debris deep in the ear, he might want to irrigate it for you. Then, you will have to do follow up cleanings/daily meds.

Other signs of ear infections (once established & far enough along to cause irritation): Head shaking, holding the head tilted down to one side, scratching at ears a lot. Some dogs will do this and shake their heads, twitch ears when a tick is crawling on their ear skin. Check for ticks, as well! It is a good idea to make ear inspection part of your regular routine. Encourage your puppy to allow you to touch his ears. This will make your life far easier if you have to apply medication to sore ears. Puppy won't want to have you messing with his ears for the first time at THAT moment.

Then & Now:

