

Post-operative Management of an Arthrodesis

Your pet has had an unstable joint surgically fused with metallic implants and a bone graft. This procedure is known as an arthrodesis. These implants are secured to the bone, bridging the joint to provide stability until the bones heal together. This fusion takes quite some time and activity restrictions must be quite strict for acceptable healing to occur.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTION x 8 weeks

- Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe indoor location with no free access to stairs for the next 24-48 hours as he/she recovers from anesthesia and surgery. Your pet may be groggy for the first few days. He or she may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your veterinarian for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.
- Confine your pet to one level/section of the house on carpeted floors. Use baby gates, etc. to prevent access to slippery floors or stairs. Confine to a small area/room/crate when unattended. Please do not allow any playing, running or jumping. For dogs, use a short leash when going outside to urinate/defecate.
- Your pet should start touching his/her toe down within the first 2 weeks. Thereafter, leg use should steadily improve each week. By 8 weeks, he/she should be 90% recovered and using the splinted leg well. If he/she suddenly deteriorates or does not appear to be progressing well enough, please return to your veterinarian for an evaluation. Radiographs may be needed to diagnose the problem.
- Your pet will feel like fully using the leg before the bones are fused. Please continue restrictions during this difficult time when he/she is feeling "too" well! Failure to do so may cause serious healing problems.

BANDAGE CARE

- A splint has been applied to the operated limb. The goal of the splint is to 1) provide pressure to the surgical site to minimize swelling and improve patient comfort, 2) provide additional, much needed, support to the healing bones until fusion occurs. Please place a *plastic baggy over the foot* whenever you take your pet outside to prevent soiling of the bandage; *immediately remove the bag* once the animal is back indoors. If the bandage slips below the incision or becomes soiled or wet at any time, please return for replacement within 6-8 hours. Soiled and wet splints can cause *serious complications*.
- The splint needs to be changed approximately every week during the recovery period, for a total *splint* time of approximately *6 weeks*. Some cases will require more frequent visit for splint adjustment or replacement depending on wear, damage, soiling, or discomfort.
- Do not allow your pet chew the splint. Pets tend to want to chew early in the healing period when the surgical site is most uncomfortable, or when the splint is causing pain or itching from skin moistness or pressure sores. If necessary, please use an E-collar if you must leave your pet unattended. *Do not ignore continued splint chewing; this may indicate a problem that requires attention*. Please have the splint evaluated immediately.

PROGRESS EXAMS

- Return to your veterinarian in *10-14 days* for a progress exam. Skin healing and leg function will be evaluated, *sutures* will be removed, the splint will be replaced, and any physical therapy questions will be addressed.
- If your pet is doing well, the next visit for *radiographs* will be *6-8 weeks* after surgery. Leg function will be evaluated, and x-rays will be taken of the fusion site to judge healing.
- Your pet may need to be seen again at 12 weeks for further x-rays to determine final healing of the bone.

LONG TERM LIFESTYLE

- After the arthrodesis is fully healed, there are no restrictions on activities for your pet. A gradual return to full function should occur, to allow for a smooth return of muscle function and strength following the restricted period.
- Your pet will have an altered gait with the joint fused; this is due to the fact that that joint can no longer flex and extend with weight bearing. This is a functional lameness, not a painful lameness. It may cause some disability with jumping, and activities that require agility. Use caution as you re-introduce your pet to activities.
- Once an arthrodesis is well healed, there is minimal risk to that site in the future. In approximately 25% of patients, the metal implants may cause irritation, become loose, or, rarely, become infected. Implants can also create bone pain caused by cold temperatures since they are only covered with a thin skin layer. *The metal implants may have to be removed* months to years after the original surgery *if they cause the patient problems*. Please have your veterinarian evaluate any lameness or pain you notice associated with the operated leg. Implant removal will require a second surgical procedure that is not accounted for in the original surgery fees.