

Elbow dislocation



One of the most useful and efficient ways to convey information to you about your pet is via the written word. We carefully craft these notes to give you helpful information and accurate expectations around your pet's surgical experience.

Please read this. *Please save it and read it during each stage of the recovery process.* Surprises make for a stressful time for everyone.

Photo and video examples may be found on our website: www.directvetsurg.com in the Pet Owner Portal under "DVS Resources".

Your pet has had a luxation (i.e. dislocation) of the elbow joint manually reduced (i.e. replaced without surgery) and stabilized with external splint support alone or in combination with internal surgical stabilization. Internal stabilization involves direct repair of the ligaments torn when the elbow luxated; this repair must be supported to allow for permanent scar tissue to return the damaged ligaments and joint capsule close to their original strength. Although the majority of patients will not have a repeat of their luxation, the elbow joint is very unforgiving with respect to trauma. Long term joint stiffness and degenerative joint disease (i.e. "arthritis") may be a complication that must be managed.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please keep a note of your questions as you and your pet progress thru recovery and address them to your primary care veterinary team. ****Use your checklist at the end of these notes to make these check-ins complete.****

First few days postop

MONITORING

Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe, indoor location without free access to stairs for the next 24 hours as he/she recovers from anesthesia and surgery.

Your pet may be groggy for the next 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 primary care veterinary team for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.

Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 2-3 days,* please call your primary care veterinary team or return for progress evaluation and problem-solving.

You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5 days. Some animals take longer than others depending on when they last ate prior to surgery and when they started eating after surgery. It may be abnormal in color and consistency for 2-3 days. If you have any concerns, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Please confirm that your pet has urinated within 24 hours of returning home. If he/she does not, or you notice any problems related to urination, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Closely supervise your pet's movements over the first 3-4 days when s/he will be groggy from anesthetics and pain medications. Do not allow access to dangerous situations/locations (i.e. stairs, furniture, small children, other pets). Limit activities to necessary events only (on leash/out to go to the bathroom; access to food/water.)

MEDICATIONS

It is likely that you have been prescribed one or more medications (given by mouth) for your pet over the first 2-3wks of recovery. During the discharge appointment or shortly thereafter, please make sure you understand:

- what each medication is being used to treat,
- what side-effects may develop, and
- whether or not the medication should be refilled and continued.

BANDAGE/SPLINT MANAGEMENT

Your pet has had a bandage applied to protect the elbow injury or surgical site. Careful monitoring and maintenance is necessary for safe and effective bandage wear. *Major problems can result from simple bandages; please do not hesitate to call your veterinarian if any problems are noted.*

Please monitor the bandage for slipping or damage from chewing, etc. If it changes position or loses its integrity (i.e. section is chewed off), serious problems may occur with healing or new problems with pressure sores may develop. Please call if any changes in bandage position occur; the bandage may need to be replaced.

Check the two central toenails twice daily (i.e. look at or feel them). They should be close together. If they are spreading apart, this indicates toe swelling which can result in serious complications, and the bandage needs to be assessed by a veterinarian within 4-6 hours. Please call your veterinarian (or see your local veterinary emergency clinic) if any swelling is noted.

If any changes or concerns with the bandage/splint, please take a photo and email to your primary care veterinary team with questions/concerns and ask for guidance.

Please keep the bandage clean and dry. Place a plastic baggy on the end every time your pet goes outside. Remove the bandage when indoors. *If the bandage gets wet or you notice any bad odor coming from the bandage, it will need to be evaluated within 6-8 hours; serious skin problems may develop.* If this happens late at night, the next morning is soon enough for a recheck/replacement; no need for an ER visit.

Week 1-2 postop

ACTIVITY RESTRICTION X 6 WEEKS

Confine your pet to one level/section of the house on carpeted floors. Use baby gaiters, etc. to prevent access to slick floors or stairs. Do not allow jumping on/off furniture. 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 6 weeks, he/she should be 90% recovered. If he/she suddenly deteriorates or does not appear to be progressing well enough, please return to your veterinarian for exam; x-rays may be needed to diagnose the problem.

Your pet will feel like using the leg normally before the bone is healed. Please continue the restriction during this difficult time when he/she is feeling "too" well! Failure to do so may cause serious healing problems.

If your pet is not using the limb by 3 weeks, if you notice a sudden deterioration, or if your pet stops using the leg at any time after surgery, please call your veterinarian for advice. While it is not unusual for brief episodes of discomfort over 2-3 months of healing, limping that continues for more than 24 hours should be examined. X-rays or other tests may be needed to diagnose significant problems.

PROGRESS EXAMS

Please return to your veterinarian in 5-7 days for a progress exam. Splint integrity and wear will be evaluated and replaced if necessary.

Please return again to your veterinarian 10-14 days after repair for a second progress exam. The splint will be removed, sutures will be removed (if any), and the elbow joint will be evaluated for stability. The splint may be replaced if necessary for an additional week if weakness is still noted in the joint. Leg function will be evaluated, and physical therapy recommendations will be adjusted.

DIET

The **most** beneficial and **least** expensive treatment for arthritis and joint health (and general health) over the lifetime of your pet (especially after a joint injury) is maintaining your pet on the lean/thin side of normal his/her whole life. Any orthopedic condition can progress with arthritis over time due to excessive wear & tear; carrying less body weight will relieve some of this stress from the joints. Good parameters to monitor body condition are:

- 1) you should be able to feel the ribs and pelvic bones, but not see them;
- 2) your pet should have an "hour glass" figure when viewed from above looking down;

3) your pet should have a tucked-up belly when viewed from the side.

Glucosamine/chondroitin supplements (“chondroprotectants”) may have some beneficial effects in patients with previous orthopedic injury, but this has not been clearly established. High-dose (medicinal dose) fish oil may improve comfort in arthritic joints longterm. You and your veterinarian should discuss whether or not these products would be helpful for your pet.

RESTRICTIONS

Restrict your pet from any rigorous activity for 6 weeks. No running, jumping, playing. For dogs, short, leashed walks around the yard to urinate/defecate are fine. Walking around one level of the house is fine. Prevent all pets from jumping up and down from furniture, etc. A bad landing or an awkward take-off can result in serious repercussions.

Limited, supervised access to stairs is recommended for 6 weeks. Restrict access to stairs when your pet is unattended (baby gates, etc.) Use caution and direct supervision on stairs (up and down) with a hand on the collar and a safety strap/leash under the belly to prevent falls.

Please **always** use a short (6 ft) leash when taking your pet outside to urinate/defecate during this restriction period. Use a belly band/sling/strap for safety when walking across slippery floors & icy sidewalks to prevent falling.

The *Help ‘em Up harness* (see company website; or similar) is a very useful tool that your dog can wear during the restricted period that allows you to have a quick “handle” to grasp by the shoulders and by the rump to assist your pet to rise and lie down, climb/descend stairs, save from a slippery floor, etc.

If your pet’s personality-type challenges these restrictions, discuss options for medicinal-assistance for your pet to make restrictions easier to manage (i.e. Trazadone, Gabapentin, Tramadol, other).

PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMEN

Our lives are often very busy, so if you must err, err on the "do less" side of these instructions. Less physical therapy will result in a slower return to function, but more aggressive physical therapy by a non-professional too early may result in failure of the implants and surgical repair. Cats (and some dogs) often resist physical therapy dramatically; avoid any activity that results in major uncooperative behavior.

Studies have shown that a formal PT program can decrease post-operative recovery time. Please let us or your veterinarian know if you are interested in a professional physical therapy referral in the Twin Cities.

Week 3. Massage-- Have your pet lie on his/her good side. Perform both superficial skin massage and deeper muscle massage. Skin massage around the upper arm and elbow involves using your fingers loosely on the surface of the skin, applying enough pressure to move

the skin relative to the underlying tissues. Muscle massage of the upper arm involves deeper kneading and pushing of the muscles. Perform massage for 10-15 minutes twice daily. Continue 4 weeks.

Week 3: Extension-only Range of Motion Exercise-- Have your pet lie on his/her good side. Apply a warm compress to elbow. Slowly pull the foot and push from behind the elbow into full extension of the elbow; hold for 5 seconds and release. Repeat this motion 15-20 times twice daily. This exercise should not be performed to the point of pain or resentment. Continue 1 week.

Month 1-2 postop

Week 4: Full Range of Motion Exercise-- Have your pet lie on his/her good side. Apply a warm compress to elbow. Grip the foot with one hand and slowly and gently push the foot up into flexion of all joints; hold for 5 seconds. Slowly pull the foot and push from behind the elbow into full extension of the elbow; hold for 5 seconds. Repeat this motion 15-20 times twice daily. This exercise should not be performed to the point of pain or resentment. Continue 4 weeks.

Week 6: Active exercise (for dogs)-- Place your pet on a short leash and have him/her walk at your side. Walk outside on even/solid footing for 10 minutes twice daily. Continue 4 weeks.

Swimming is wonderful rehabilitation exercise (for some dogs) when performed correctly. You may allow controlled swimming after week 4. Controlled swimming requires that your pet not jump or leap into the water; walking into the water until it is deep enough to swim is required. Throwing balls to fetch often results in sudden jumping and lunging, which can cause serious problems in the healing phase. Do not over extend your pet; start with short excursions (5 minutes) and increase duration and frequency gradually.

Long-term lifestyle

After the supporting tissues of the elbow are 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.

Elbow joints can be very unforgiving following a serious injury; stiffness and discomfort can be signs of degenerative joint disease (i.e. arthritis) that may progress over time. Maintaining a lean body condition and a moderate degree of low-impact activity will be very helpful in optimizing the long-term function of your pet's elbow.

For patients who had a surgical repair of the elbow dislocation (not just a manual manipulation to replace the joint), occasionally the metal implants used to stabilize the joint can become infected; it is believed these infections originate either from a wound at the time of injury or from bacteria normally found in the blood stream in patients with infections elsewhere in the body or from dental disease. If this happens, the metal implants will have to be removed once the joint is healed, 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. This implant removal is rarely indicated, but will require a second minor surgical procedure under general anesthesia.

Checklist:

HOME MONITORING AND PROGRESS CHECK-IN WITH VETERINARY TEAM

- Pet attitude and appetite—Are these improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Pet mobility—Is this improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Incision health—Is redness and swelling going away? Is there discharge or moisture? (Photos taken close-up and at different angles are helpful for your primary care veterinary team,)
- Pet pain level—What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Other

Based on your own experience through this, we welcome and encourage suggestions to this information that may help future patients and their people. Pay it forward! (directvetsurg@gmail.com)

--The DVS Crew