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## Foot Fracture Repair

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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](http://www.directvetsurg.com) in the Pet Owner Portal under "DVS Resources".

Your pet has had fractures of the foot (metacarpal bones/front foot or metatarsal bones/rear foot) repaired with metallic implants called bone plates/screws and/or pins. These implants are surgically attached to the bone, bridging the fracture in that bone to provide stability until the bone heals to its original strength. A splint is always necessary for foot fracture repair during recovery until the bones heal; the metal implants are not big enough to withstand the large forces acting on the foot during walking. Most commonly, two, of the four, foot bones will be supported internally with plate/pins. Most patients do not have long term activity restrictions, and the majority of patients will have their implants for their lifetime.

### 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. Our surgery group will contact your primary care team on **Day 2** (after their phone follow-up with you) and **Day 14** (after your recheck visit with them) to check in on your pet's progress and see if you have had any concerns or questions. This method will maintain continuity in care and an accurate patient medical record.

### First few days postop

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.

## MEDICATIONS

It is likely that your pet has been prescribed one or more medications (given by mouth) 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 CARE

A padded bandage with rigid splint has been applied to the operated site. The goal of this bandage is to provide pressure to the surgical site to minimize swelling, improve patient comfort and provide some additional support to the surgical repair.

**It is recommended the limb be supported with a rigid bandage for up to 6-8 weeks. The first bandage change is recommended in 3 days.**

The next bandage changes are recommended every 3-7 days depending on swelling and healing progress; adjustments to this interval will happen through the recovery period.

It is very important you monitor the bandage carefully. Check for swelling of the toes (i.e. toe nails spreading apart), excess wound discharge (fluids seeping through the bandage), rub sores (at the top or bottom edges), or foul odors.

The bandage/splint should be comfortable; a pet chewing at the bandage may indicate a serious problem. Please visit with your primary care veterinary team within 8hrs if the bandage appears uncomfortable.

Keep the bandage/splint clean and dry. Apply a plastic bag or protective boot over the bandage/splint when your pet goes outside; remove when indoors. If the bandage becomes wet or soiled, it will need to be changed within 8hrs; please contact your primary care veterinary team.

We strongly advised that you do not modify the bandage in any way. Adding tape or other wrappings can seriously compromise the safety of the bandage/splint. If you are concerned about the security or integrity of the bandage, please return for re-evaluation and reapplication as needed.

*\*\*Please know that bandages and splints can cause very serious complications. They are very effective treatment tools for better healing and pain control, but careful monitoring and appropriate follow-up must occur. If you have any questions or concerns related to issues outlined above or in general regarding bandage/splint wear, please do not hesitate to call your veterinarian or return for evaluation.\*\**

## RESTRICTIONS

It is very important to restrict activity until healing is seen on x-rays. No running, jumping, playing. Confine your pet to one level/section of the house or crate confine. Use baby gates, etc. to prevent access to slick floors or stairs. Do not allow jumping on/off furniture. to a small area/room/crate when unattended.

If it is necessary to navigate some stairs, they should be kept to a minimum. Use caution and direct supervision (up and down) with a hand on the collar/harness and a safety strap/leash under the belly to prevent falls. The Help 'Em Up harness is a useful tool for assisting your pet that we have personally found to be very ergonomic; you can find this resource at <https://helpemup.com/>

Please always use a short (6 ft) leash when taking your pet outside to urinate/defecate during this restriction period.

## **Week 1-2 postop**

Your pet should start touching his/her toe down within the first 2 weeks. Thereafter, leg use should steadily improve. If your pet is not using the limb by 2 weeks, if you notice a sudden deterioration, or if your pet stops using the leg at any time after surgery please call your primary care veterinary team for guidance. 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.

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

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, other).

## BANDAGE CHANGE/PROGRESS EXAMS

It is important that regular bandage changes be performed to monitor for complications that can develop under a bandage. The foot sweats normally and will create a damp/warm environment under the bandage. “Athlete’s Foot”-type skin irritation (dermatitis) is common and somewhat tolerated and managed until the bandage can be removed.

## **Month 1-2 postop**

Activity restrictions continue to be important. Bandages become more difficult to manage, complications occur more frequently, and bone healing is delayed when activity restriction are not enforced.

Some patients will have a less rigid, soft padded bandage applied after the rigid splint is removed. This allows for a gradual return of stress to the injured area.

After bandage/splint removal, many pets are sore and limp more for a few days. If this setback lasts longer than a few days, please contact your primary care veterinary team for guidance.

X-rays are recommended 6-8wks after surgery to evaluate bone healing. Depending on the stage of healing, additional x-rays may be recommended to monitor the recovery.

A slow return to activity, on leash, can begin after the x-rays and exam confirm an appropriate stage of healing.

## Long-term lifestyle

There are no long-term restrictions for your pet, after the fracture is healed.

Once a fracture is well healed, there is minimal risk to that site in the future. The metal implants (plate/screws, pins) do not create problems in the majority of patients.

Occasionally these metal implants will become infected, loosen or create bone pain from extreme cold temperatures. Even months to years after the original surgery, if the metal implants cause the patient problems, they may need to be removed.

Please have your veterinarian evaluate any lameness or pain you notice associated with the injured foot.

## 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](mailto:directvetsurg@gmail.com))

--The DVS Crew