

General Postoperative care for orthopaedic surgery

Your pet friend has had surgery and these are general guidelines to help you with the postoperative recovery and management. Please contact us or your vet should you have any other worries.

Incision:

Please do use the Elisabeth collar (the so called 'cone of shame') or any other means to prevent you pet from reaching the wound. Pet body shirts (pet onesie) are available and are very practical. For lower limb incisions, socks, t-shirts are also useful.

Most of the incisions have resorbable, intradermal (hidden) sutures. This means there are no stitches to be removed.

The incision should be clean, dry, without discharge. Swelling and bruising is considered normal for the first 3-5 days. However, if you do notice redness of the skin, please get in touch with your vet.

Some minor bleeding may occur in the first 24 hours after the surgery. If this last more than this time, please see your vet.

If the incision opens up, do not panic. However, you must find a method to stop your pet from reaching the wound and you must see your vet ASAP.

TL;DR:

Keep incision away from your pets reach.

Incision has to be clean, dry and closed.

Bruising is normal for the first 5-7 days.

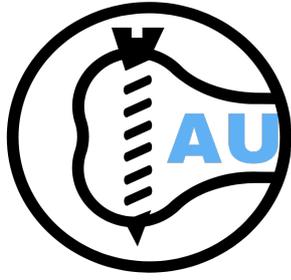
Is better to see your vet if you are worried rather than ignore a problem.

Medication

Your pet would have been prescribed:

Anti-inflammatory drugs – they are prescribed for 7-14 days. The most common side effects are gastrointestinal i.e. vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Should these occur, please stop the anti-inflammatory drugs immediately and see your vet. In humans, anti-inflammatory drugs have been associated with delayed healing of the bones so we try to minimise their use.

Analgesics – these drugs are prescribed for 7-14 days. In general, they have minimal side effects but the most common one is drowsiness.



Antibiotics – as humanity is more aware of the risks of overprescribing antibiotics, the general medical consensus is to try to reduce their use. We would very rarely prescribe antibiotics as we try to maintain high standards of our pre-, intra- and post- operative asepsis.

Aftercare

The first 2 weeks

Sutures are usually resorbable, under the skin and there is no need to be removed.

Check ups with your vet/nurse are recommended at day 3 and day 10 postoperative.

Limping is to be expected, this is due to surgical trauma.

Swelling, around the surgical site is acceptable in the first 5-7 days postoperative.

The incision should be clean and dry. If the wound opens up or if there is discharge, please see your vet.

For cats, the same principles apply.

*** From week 2 postoperative, the incision should be clean, dry, with a normal colour of the skin and not red, puffy or open. Please contact your vet if this is not the case

For cats, room bound restrictions apply for this time interval. The rest of the principles still apply, including hydrotherapy.

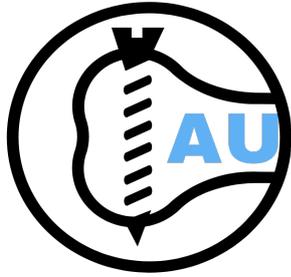
Week 2 to week 6 postoperative

Gradual improvement of the lameness should be noted. Weight bearing should be noted from day 3 to 5 postoperative. If this does not happen, please contact your vet.

Once the incision has healed, hydrotherapy or physiotherapy can be started and we do encourage it – please see our ‘Postoperative recovery’ sheet on our website.

Follow up xrays are recommended at 4-6 weeks postoperative; these are performed to assess the metal implants and healing of the bones. In the rare case where complications occur, follow up xrays would allow us to act quickly, before the situation turns disastrous.

For cats, room bound restrictions apply for this time interval. The rest of the principles still apply, including hydrotherapy and physiotherapy.



Week 6 to 12 postoperative

By now, lameness should be sporadic and rarely noticeable. Do not panic if this is not your case, remember, some patients recover faster than others. Also, remember that some fractures can have long term consequences and continuous lameness.

Providing all is well and recovery is within normal time frame, you should be allowed to walk your dog on a long lead and even short, gentle trots are allowed.

For cats, the full roam of the house should be allowed, however, the kitchen is still a forbidden space because of the countertops – these high surfaces are too risky for a cat to jump on at this stage.

A follow up check which should be the sign off consult should be booked at your vet around week 12 postoperative. More X-rays may be needed in patients who heal slower than average.



TL;DR

Gradual improvement should be noticed.

Deterioration is not normal and a vet check should be considered.

X-rays are usually needed 4-6 weeks postoperative.

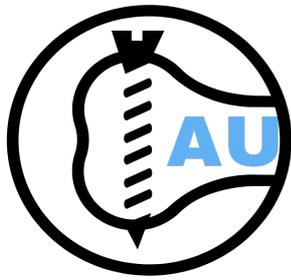
Exercise

Any metal implant will fail giving the right amount of time and force. Metal fails to cyclic loading – imagine a paper clip you straighten to a wire. It would be difficult to break the paperclip in one step but, if you repeatedly bend it, the metal will break. This happens with any orthopaedic implant if the bone does not heal. One might say that a fracture repair is a race between bone healing and metal failure. Most of the times, the bone wins, fortunately. Each step your pet takes is a cycle that fatigues the metal.

Restricted exercise is important to reduce the load and cycles on the implants.

For dogs, this means no sofa, chairs, stairs etc. Also, it means lead walks only, even in the garden – we would not want your dog to chase a squirrel in the garden and break the implants. The lead walks should be 10-15 min long, 2 to 4 times a day. Every 7 to 10 days, 5 minutes can be added to the walks i.e. 15-20 min per walk from week 2, 20-25 min per walk from week three etc.

Restricted exercise should be enforced for the first 6—12 weeks postoperative; the follow up xrays should help us adjust the exercise regime according to the speed of bone healing.



For cats, restricted exercise means room bound/large cage rest. The room should not have tall surfaces for your cat to jump on – kitchens/utility rooms are less than ideal. If you use a bedroom, please try to take the mattress off the base. Like this, your cat will not have a great height to jump. This room confinement should be enforced for at least the first 6 weeks. The follow up xrays would help us decide if your cat can be allowed more exercise. All being well, house bound should be enforced from week 6 to 12 postoperative.

TL;DR

Exercise restriction for the first 12 weeks is a must after orthopaedic surgery.
Situation can turn disastrous if too much is done too soon.

Bandages, dressings, casts

We try not to use bandages however, if your pet does have a bandage, it needs some attention.

- The bandage must not slip. If it does, please see your vet immediately.
- The bandage must stay dry and clean. Mud, urine, faeces do not belong to a bandage.
- The toes are usually palpable. You must check the toes for warmth and sensitivity twice a day. To check for sensitivity, please try to squeeze the toes; if this is not possible, try to poke the toes with a ball point pen. Your pet should react, showing that it can feel the toes.
- The toes should not swell up.
- The bandage should not smell offensive.
- Most bandage/casts are removed 4 weeks postoperative.

Postoperative checks

The surgical site should be checked by a vet/nurse usually 3 and 10 days postoperative.

Follow up xrays should be planned for 4-6 weeks postoperative. Your pet will be sedated during this procedure so please bring him/her starved. You can leave the water down.

For young, growing pets, xrays may be needed only after 2-3 weeks postoperative.

Your pet should steadily improve following an orthopaedic procedure. If it has a downturn, please see your vet. As a general rule, is better to be over-caring than indifferent so do not be embarrassed to ask for help if you are not sure about a certain issue.

Please remember that these are only guidelines and some pets take longer to heal than other. We strive to tailor each postoperative plan to the needs of your pet.