

## Dressings and casts

Dressings serve a number of purposes:

- ✓ immobilising part of a limb
- ✓ protecting wounds from contamination, trauma and licking
- ✓ providing an optimal healing environment for wounds
- ✓ controlling swelling

Casts and splints are incorporated into a dressing to increase rigidity. Dressings and casts can only effectively immobilise an area below the elbow and the stifle (knee).

Our preference is to dress the whole limb below the area of interest, to stop the bottom of the limb from swelling. We like to be able to feel the toes by slipping two fingers up the middle of the dressing. The toes should be warm, not swollen, and the pet should be able to feel that the toes are being touched. If an animal is chewing or licking at a dressing or cast, or if there is a foul smell, see urgent advice. If you are in any doubt, get the dressing checked as an emergency.

**Dressings and casts must not be interfered with by the pet.** An Elizabethan collar may be needed to limit interference, but carefully check the toes as above, to ensure the patient is not simply reacting to a dressing that is overly tight.

**Dressings and casts should stay clean.** If ooze can be seen soaking through or if there is a noticeable smell, seek prompt advice. If the dressing becomes fouled with urine/faeces etc, seek prompt attention.

**Dressings and casts should stay dry.** Serious damage to underlying wounds and soft tissues can otherwise result. Use a polythene bag to protect the dressing for a few minutes at a time during toileting in the garden etc. Don't leave these on. We can provide bags that are ideal for this purpose.

**Dressings and casts are worse than useless if they slip.** They are then no longer immobilising the area that they are supposed to be, but worse than that, they are actually increasing the leverage acting on that area.

**You will be told when to get the dressing / cast checked or changed. Please keep these appointments.** If the dressing slips, becomes soiled or becomes wet, then please seek prompt attention without waiting for your next routine appointment. Dressing changes may be with your own vet to save un-necessary travelling. We would like to see cases back at 2-3 weeks post-operatively when we can remove sutures/staples and check that all is going to plan.

**Exercise restriction** is required to avoid encouraging the wound to slip. Just allow 5 minutes of lead restricted exercise, three times a day, until you are advised to the contrary. For dogs, use leads anywhere outside of the house including the garden. Running/jumping/climbing (into cars, upstairs, onto furniture or kitchen work tops etc) should all be prevented. Consider using stair gates and ramps. Ensure doors and windows are closed to prevent escapes!

### Complications

Dressings and casts are not the benign things that many people think them to be. Animals can, and do, lose legs because of dressing and cast complications. If the dressing is too tight or if the leg swells excessively within the dressing, the circulation stops. This leads to tissue death and the damage may prove unsalvageable.

If a wet dressing is left on the leg, it can lead to awful skin ulceration and infection. Underlying wounds may break down.

Pressure points under the dressing, like the ankle, are prone to local tissue damage from dressings. Rigid dressings like casts and splints are especially likely to cause these problems.

The top of dressings can sometimes chafe and rub the adjacent skin. Soreness resolves once the dressing is removed.

**For further advice please contact us by phone on 07944 105501 or on mail@wm-referrals.com**