

Post-operative care for patients after arthrodesis

Arthrodesis is the artificial fusion of a joint, usually because of fracture, degenerative disease or ligament failure and joint collapse. The joint cartilage is removed, the adjacent bones are abutted and fixed with metalwork, and a bone graft is often taken from another part of the body. The carpus (wrist) and tarsus (ankle) are the joints most commonly arthrodesed. Partial arthrodesis of a region is sometimes possible to save more range of movement post-operatively.

Medication:	Antibiotics:	We usually dispense antibiotics like claviseptin (tablets given twice daily)
	Anti-inflammatories:	We are likely to have dispensed carprofen (tablets given twice daily), or meloxicam (a liquid given once daily). These are given with food. They occasionally cause vomiting or diarrhoea, in which case prompt advice should be sought. There are a number of other excellent anti-inflammatory drugs that your own vet might use including Onsiar and Previcox.
	Analgesics:	We sometimes dispense tramadol (tablets given twice daily) to dogs. For cats we may have dispensed buprenorphine, to be given every 8 hours by mouth by syringe

The wound and dressings should not be interfered with or bathed. An Elizabethan collar helps prevent wound interference. We usually cover the wound with a thin white Primapore dressing, secured with a spray glue. Primapores fall off in anything from a few days to a couple of weeks. Without the spray glue, it is very unlikely that you will be able to get a replacement Primapore to stick so please leave ours in place as long as possible! A few drops of dried discharge may be evident on the Primapore, but if there is any on-going discharge please gently blot it with kitchen towel and seek advice promptly. More substantial dressings are often used for a few days or a couple of weeks over the basic Primapore to reduce swelling. If used, these should be kept dry at all times. If they become wet or slip seek advice promptly. If you aren't clear on when the next dressing removal or change is required, please seek advice.

Immediately post op

Your pet can be allowed to eat and drink on the evening after surgery. Eating, drinking and urination should have been seen on the morning after surgery – if not, please call us without delay. Please note that there is sometimes no defaecation for several days.

Rechecks a few days after surgery, and possibly for dressing changes, may be with your own vet to save un-necessary travelling. We can do check-ups at Lichfield if travelling is not an issue, and all post-op check-ups with us are free of charge under our "fixed price" schemes. In any event, for cases operated by us at Lichfield, please contact us to book an appointment no more than 2-3 weeks post-operatively when we can check that all is going to plan. For surgeries performed at your home practice, please be sure to ring your own vets to book check ups. For dogs that get very anxious at the vets, a simple phone conversation and a texted/emailed photo of the wound may suffice in lieu of checks at the clinic. **By 3-5 days there should be significant weight-bearing on the operated leg. There may well be some skin bruising evident. There may be some significant swelling lower down the leg as inflammation "drops". Swelling and bruising should disappear with a few days.** At the 2-3 week check, sutures may be removed or left to slough

Strict lead restriction is essential anywhere outside of the house including the garden until x-rays confirm adequate healing. Running / jumping / climbing (into cars, upstairs, onto furniture) **must** be prevented. Keep doors closed. Consider using stair gates, ramps, or a cage. Close doors and windows to prevent escapes! Just allow 5 minutes of walking/lead exercise, three times a day, until you are advised to the contrary. If activity is not strictly restricted, then disruption of our fixation, and fractures of associated bones are all very real possibilities.

Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy and weight control

Encouraging walking is helpful – putting water/food bowls on the other side of the room from your pet's bed encourages rising and stretching. Hydrotherapy can help maintain the range of motion of the other joints in the limb, and can help to maintain muscle mass. Hydrotherapy is delayed until 3-4 weeks post-operatively when the wound can stand immersion. We only recommend the use of a hydrotherapy centre that is approved by the Canine Hydrotherapy Association. A list of Canine Hydrotherapy Association centres can be found at www.wm-referrals.com, or ask your own vet for their local recommendation. Avoid weight gain during restricted activity post-op.

Follow up radiographs are usually taken at 8 weeks post-operatively with us or with your own vets to confirm that bone bridging across the fused joint is occurring. Free exercise is not allowed until radiographs have confirmed that this is occurring. Follow up radiography usually requires sedation so it is best not to feed your pet on the day of this procedure.

Prognosis and complications

The future is usually bright after arthrodesis of the carpus (wrist), the tarsus (ankle) or the shoulder. Good function can be expected, even when joints on both sides are fused. This is in contrast to arthrodesis of the elbow or the stifle (knee) where the goal is a pain free functional leg that will bear weight, but where the movement of the limb will be obviously awkward and ungainly. Implants don't usually need removal.

Infection – this is uncommon, but it does occasionally happen and usually requires removal of the metalwork.

Implant related irritation – occasionally implants cause irritation or work loose and need removal. Sometimes implants positioned low down in the limbs can ache in cold weather.

Our fixed prices include any follow up consults and x-rays done with us, but don't include further medication or revision surgery. For further details please see www.wm-referrals.com, "about us", "FAQs".

For further advice please contact us by phone on 07944 105501 or at mail@wm-referrals.com. Consider texting/emailing pictures.