

Post-operative care for patients with an external fixator

External fixators involve pins secured in bone and fixed by a “scaffolding” of rods and clamps and/or acrylic that is external to the leg. These are commonly placed for fracture fixation, or to temporarily immobilise joints after ligament injuries. Removal usually requires sedation or a short general anaesthetic which is chargeable.

Medication:	Antibiotics:	We usually dispense antibiotics like claviseptin (tablets given twice daily). These may need continuing for several weeks.
	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 may have dispensed tramadol (tablets given twice daily) for dogs or buprenorphine (liquid given every 8 hours by mouth) for cats.

Dressings are almost always used for at least a few days post-operatively to help control swelling. Swelling is often quite significant in the first few days after external fixator placement. Dressings should be kept dry at all times. If they do become wet or if they slip, seek our advice promptly.

Strict restriction and supervision of activity is required. **External fixators readily “hook up” on all sorts of things like curtains, radiators, carpets, fences etc. For this reason we strongly advise that when cats or dogs don’t have your UNDIVIDED attention, they are confined to a cage.** Cages which will fold flat when not in use are readily available from pet superstores, Argos, many DIY stores or from on-line retailers. Remember that the fixator can hook up on the cage itself, so place cardboard on the inside of the cage up to the patient’s shoulder height to keep the fixator from getting tangled in the cage bars.

For dogs, a lead should be used to restrict activity anywhere outside of the house including the garden. Allow just 5 minutes of lead restricted exercise, three times a day, until you are advised to the contrary. For cats, several short periods of supervised walking around the kitchen are allowed each day. For both species, running/jumping/climbing (into cars, upstairs, onto furniture, onto kitchen work tops etc) should be prevented. Consider using stair gates and ramps, and ensure doors and windows are shut to avoid escapes!

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 will usually be with us until swelling has settled down. If the early rechecks aren’t with us because travelling is an issue, we would appreciate being sent regular photographs of the fixator using text or email. All post-op check-ups are free of charge with us under our “fixed price” schemes. Please contact us to book an appointment for us to see the case back 2-3 weeks post-operatively when we can remove sutures/staples and check that all is going to plan.

Once dressings are removed, wounds and pin tracts can be cleaned by gentle blotting with kitchen towel, but if ooze is seen, advice should be sought. If the pet gives the wounds/fixator an occasional lick, this is unlikely to cause problems, but use an Elizabethan collar to can help prevent interference with the wounds/fixator, or if the patient is left unattended for prolonged periods such as overnight.

Skin-clamp contact can cause tissue damage to the underlying soft tissues. If the tissues swell so that the skin comes into contact with any of the clamps so that a length of each pin is not visible, seek our advice promptly.

Pins sometimes loosen prematurely. Exudate from the pin entry site is usually present. Any infection resolves once the loose pins are removed. There may be a need to place replacement pins if loosening occurs early in the healing process.

We will often disassemble the external fixator in a series of stages in the weeks following placement. This can often be done with the pet conscious or sedated. X-rays are typically taken after 6-8 weeks under sedation to confirm that bone healing is progressing.

What does the future hold? The future is usually very bright after fracture repair with external fixators. If joints were involved in the original injury, degenerative joint disease, often called “arthritis”, may develop in the future. Your own vet will advise you of what, if any, action is required.

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.