

Post-operative care for patients after surgery for Achilles tendon injury or enthesiopathy

Enthesiopathy is a degenerative pathological process affecting the Achilles tendon and its insertion onto the tuber calcaneus (a bony prominence) below and behind the most mobile level of the hock (“ankle”) joint. We most often see enthesiopathy in Dobermans and Labradors. It can affect both hock joints in the same dog. The hock joint(s) will partly collapse under weight with the hock tending to go down onto the ground, rather like humans and bears. The Achilles tendon and its insertion onto bone are often swollen with firm fibrous tissue. We need to temporarily support the hock in extension while the tendon/tendon insertion has a chance to repair without being overloaded. Support requires one or more screws, placed from the tuber calcaneus into the tibia, and a support splint dressing. Either the screws or the support dressing is removed after 4 weeks, and the remaining support is removed after 8 weeks. Screw removal requires another short general anaesthetic and a short surgical procedure which is chargeable.

Medication:	Antibiotics:	Antibiotics like claviseptin are usually given for a few days (usually tablets given twice daily).
	Anti-inflammatories:	Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs usually start/resume the morning after surgery. These are tablets (eg carprofen, Onsior or Previcox), or liquid (meloxicam). They should be given with food. If vomiting or diarrhoea is noted, stop this medication and seek prompt advice.
	Analgesics:	We may have dispensed tramadol (tablets given twice daily) for dogs or buprenorphine (liquid given every 8 hours by mouth) for cats.

Rechecks and dressings. The dressing used to give support to the hock must not be interfered with. An Elizabethan collar can help prevent interference. The dressing must be kept dry at all times. If it becomes significantly wet or slips, seek advice promptly. Dressing changes will be done at intervals, typically every 3-7 days. Dressing changes may be with your own vet to save un-necessary travelling. We can do check-ups/dressing changes if travelling is not an issue. Our post-op check-up consultations are free of charge under our “fixed price” schemes. We would make modest charges if we are asked to do numerous dressing changes. We would like to see the case back at 2-3 weeks post-op if we haven’t seen you already by then. Please contact us to book this appointment. At the 2-3 week check, sutures may be removed or left to slough.

Strict restriction and supervision of activity is required. When cats or dogs don’t have your UNDIVIDED attention, consider confining them to a cage during the early stages of healing. Cages which will fold flat when not in use are readily available from your own vet, from us, or from pet superstores, Argos, many DIY stores or from on-line retailers. 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. 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! Please don’t increase the activity that is allowed until you are advised to do so.

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.

Rehabilitation

Laser therapy which we can offer, can assist with tendon healing. This can be done at the time of dressing changes. When the support is removed, the hock joint will initially be “frozen” with reduced range of flexion. This will improve over weeks, but is unlikely to ever become fully normal again. Encouraging gentle walking is helpful. Hydrotherapy might be advised. Ask your own vet for their recommendation for a hydrotherapy centre in your area.

What does the future hold?

Enthesiopathy sometimes progresses, despite temporary screwing. If tendon repair fails or if hock function is not adequate after screw removal, then hock fusion (pan-tarsal arthrodesis – see separate information sheet) is a salvage procedure that offers a good prognosis. Hock degenerative joint disease may develop in the future (see separate information sheet).

Complications

Dressing related sores may develop. They usually resolve without problem once the dressing is removed but they complicate the aftercare and significantly increase discomfort and costs with the need for more frequent dressing changes.

Infection is uncommon, but it does occasionally happen. It should resolve once screws are removed. Screws can occasionally cause irritation or may work loose. Screw breakage, and occasionally fracture of the calcaneus can be seen.

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”. Consults, drugs, x-rays and dressings from your usual vet will be chargeable. For further advice please contact us on 07944 105501 or at enquiries@wm-referrals.com. Consider texting/emailing pictures.