

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:	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 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 should not be interfered with or bathed. **Dressings** may be used post-operatively to control swelling or to provide extra support. The interval at which dressings are subsequently changed, and the period for which they are needed will vary from case to case. Dressing should be kept dry at all times. If they become wet, or if they slip, or if they seem to be causing irritation please seek advice promptly. This is especially important if there are splints/casts incorporated in the dressing. **Please don't attempt to replace dressings yourself**, and only remove dressings under specific advice to do so, and then only if absolutely sure that there is no risk of being bitten etc. An Elizabethan collar should then be used until a vet has advised you to the contrary. Leave any white thin Primapore dressing to fall off on its own. Our Primapores are secured with spray glue. Primapores often fall off after a few days. Without the glue, it is very unlikely that you will be able to get another Primapore to stick so please leave ours as long as possible! A few drops of dried discharge may be evident on the Primapore. If there is on-going discharge, please gently blot it with kitchen towel and seek advice promptly.

If you aren't clear on when the next dressing change is required, or when the dressing should be removed, please seek prompt advice.

Immediately post op

Your pet can eat and drink on the evening after surgery. Eating, drinking and urination should have been seen on the morning after surgery, and at least once daily thereafter – if not, please call us without delay. Defaecation sometimes isn't seen for several days post-op.

Rechecks are recommended at 2-3 weeks and 6-8 weeks post-op. Rechecks at 3-5 days are advised if there are issues. Check-ups with us at Barton under Needwood are free of further charge and only take a few minutes. Check ups at your home practice are chargeable. For rechecks at Barton under Needwood, please contact us to book an appointment. For rechecks at your home practice, please ring your own vets to book these. Where travelling is an issue, and/or for pets that get very anxious at the vets, a simple phone conversation with us and/or a text/email photo of the wound may well suffice in lieu of the 3-5 day check. **By 3-5 days there should be significant weight-bearing on the operated leg. There may well be significant bruising evident. There may be significant swelling lower down at this time as inflammation "drops" down the leg. 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. Ask your own vet for their recommendation for a hydrotherapy centre in your area. Avoid weight gain during restricted activity post-op.

Follow up radiography, to confirm bone healing before free exercise is allowed, can be performed conscious 6-8 weeks post-operatively with us for no extra charge. This only takes a few minutes with our hand-held X-ray generator. It is best not to feed your pet beforehand just in case we need to sedate. If X-rays are done at your own vets these will be chargeable and will likely require sedation or anaesthesia.

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 is uncommon, but it does occasionally happen and usually requires removal of the metalwork. 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 follow up consults and x-rays with us, and medication for around 5 days post-operatively, but don't include further medication, revision surgery or implant removal. Consults, dressings, X-rays and drugs from your usual vet will be chargeable. For further details on our fixed prices please see www.wm-referrals.com, "about us", "FAQs". For further advice please contact us on 07944 105501 or at enquiries@wm-referrals.com. Consider texting/emailing pictures and short videos.**