

Post-operative care after surgery for elbow incongruity with dynamic ulna osteotomy (DUO)

DUO is usually carried out in dogs that are still growing, often Bassett Hounds and Shi Tzus. Sometimes DUO is required when a fracture of the radius and/or ulna has occurred in a growing dog, and when issues subsequently develop eg the development of a synostosis (bone fusion) between the radius and the ulna. Sometimes other surgeries might be required around the same time eg straightening the radius if it is bowed. During a DUO, an ulna osteotomy (bone cut) is created. The top piece can then be pulled into a “best-fit” position by the triceps muscle in the weeks after surgery. This maximises the congruity (smooth running) of the elbow joint. This is important because the elbow is notoriously intolerant of any incongruity and ends up with progressive degenerative joint disease (DJD, often called “arthritis”) which can be very debilitating. The osteotomy that we create is left to heal by the formation of a callus – a mass of bone – which you will be able to feel on the back edge of the upper forearm. This firm swelling is normal and the natural way that bone heals. Healing often takes 2 months or more. The callus usually reduces over the following months/years. It is of no consequence to your pet, but it worries some owners so we warn you in advance to avoid unexpected surprise! Occasionally metalwork (pin/plate) is needed to fix the ulna.

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 often dispense tramadol, (tablets given twice daily).

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 Primapore dressing, secured with glue. Primapores fall off in anything from a few days to a couple of weeks. Without the glue, it is very unlikely that you will be able to get another Primapore to stick so please leave ours in place as long as possible! A few drops of dry discharge may be evident on the Primapore. If there is any on-going discharge please gently blot it with kitchen towel and seek advice promptly. More substantial dressings are occasionally used for a few days over the basic Primapore to reduce swelling. These should be kept dry at all times. If they become wet or slip then they can be removed, leaving the thin white Primapore layer in place as long as it will stay on to give some on-going protection.

Strict lead restriction is required in the early stages of healing, anywhere outside of the house including the garden. Running/jumping/climbing (into cars, upstairs, onto furniture) should all be prevented. Consider using stair gates and ramps. However several short periods of gentle lead restricted walking exercise per day are welcomed.

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 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 dogs 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.

Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy

Encouraging gentle walking is helpful – putting water/food bowls on the other side of the room from your pet’s bed can encourage them to rise and stretch periodically. Passive flexion / extension exercises help maintain flexibility and joint motion. Hydrotherapy helps maintain the range of joint motion and muscle mass but this 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.

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.

What does the future hold?

If bone healing doesn’t proceed to plan, occasional cases need plates placing as a second procedure around 2 months post-operatively. In the occasional cases that require metalwork to facilitate bone healing, either at the first or second surgeries, implant removal is sometimes required later. DJD is to be expected in the elbow if this has been incongruous in the weeks and months prior to surgery. DJD can sometimes already be significant at the time of surgery, and will progress. Many dogs require future medical management for DJD and your own vet will advise you what is required. See our information sheet on DJD for further information.

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, dressings, x-rays and drugs 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.