

## **Post-operative care following femoral head and neck excision (FHNE) surgery**

### **What is involved in a femoral head and neck excision surgery?**

A femoral head and neck excision (FHNE) is a salvage surgery, often performed to remove the damaged bone at the top of the femur (thigh) in the hip joint. This is usually performed in cases of chronic hip dislocations or fractures in dogs and with disorders of the blood supply to the hip (called Legg-Perthe's disease). Often patients have a painful and non-functional hip joint prior to this surgery and in cases where a total hip replacement is not possible.

The aim of this surgery is to address the pain caused by the bones rubbing in a damaged hip joint and to restore some level of function. During this procedure, the 'ball' from the ball and socket joint of the hip is removed and will be replaced by the surrounding muscles and scar-tissue leading to a 'pseudoarthrosis' (false joint). This generally leads to acceptable function in small dogs, but the success depends quite heavily on early intensive post-operative physiotherapy.

### **Exercise**

Intensive physiotherapy and early use of the limb in the immediate post-operative period is essential.

The immediate post-operative period is crucial for success of this surgery, as failure to undertake this physiotherapy leads to a tighter scar and subsequent reduced range of motion of this joint long-term. As such, following the post-operative instructions carefully is essential for a positive outcome.

Crate-restriction is generally advised for the first 10 days to allow the surgical incision to heal. Once your pet is comfortable, gently flexing and extending the affected limb can be useful two-three times daily.

After this time, patients can be given the full run of the house, including stairs and furniture. It is important to encourage your pet to use the limb as much as possible to help build up the surrounding muscle and create an appropriate pseudoarthrosis. Encouraging your dog to play, jump and use their back legs is also helpful.

Adequate pain relief is required in order for this to happen, so if you believe your pet does not want to move due to pain, please contact the clinic to have more dispensed.

### **Wound care**

Some swelling and bruising is expected, but please monitor the incision for signs of any discharge, excess swelling or redness. It is essential that an Elizabethan-collar is worn during the first few weeks to prevent any licking of the surgical site. Licking will lead to infection and can have severe consequences in orthopaedic surgery.

The skin stitches have been placed internally and are dissolvable so do not require removal. It is recommended that your pet is seen by a vet or a nurse 7-10 days after surgery to monitor the healing process, but if you have any concerns then please contact the clinic sooner. If a dressing has been

applied to the incision site, this can be left on until this appointment, but if it falls off before this time, it does not require replacing.

Swelling around the incision site can occur within the first week, but this should resolve with rest. If it does not, or if it gets worse over time, then please contact your vet. If tolerated, the incision can be ice-packed for 5-7 minutes 2-3 times daily by wrapping an icepack in a damp towel so that it does not directly contact the skin.

### **Medication**

Anti-inflammatory medications are often prescribed as pain-relief and to reduce the swelling. Please give these as directed, often with food unless otherwise stated, and please stop these immediately if you notice any signs of vomiting or diarrhoea. Other medications such as paracetamol for dogs may also be prescribed to provide adequate pain-relief to allow for effective post-operative exercise. Your vet/nurse will explain the specific medications for your pet when they are discharged.

### **What to expect**

The aim of this procedure is to manage the pain in the hip and to provide acceptable function of the limb post-operatively, with the understanding that the normal function of the hip joint is no longer present. This generally leads to a mild mechanical lameness or shortened stride.

Your pet should be comfortable during the immediate post-operative period and have enough pain-relief to allow intensive exercise after the incision has healed.

Follow-up appointments are usually booked at 7-10 days to check the incision site and at 4 and 8 weeks to assess mobility and comfort levels.

If at any stage you are unsure of the progress your pet is making or are struggling to do the exercises prescribed please contact your vet immediately.

### **Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy**

To improve flexibility, gentle massage and passive range of motion exercises can be undertaken after the first 5 days, if your pet is comfortable enough. This often entails laying your pet on their side with the affected limb upwards and massaging the muscles above and below the surgery site. Following this, the leg can be gently flexed and extended until a small amount of resistance is felt, whilst supporting the leg to prevent twisting.

As physiotherapy is essential to the outcome of this procedure, it is recommended that this is provided by an ACPAT or RAMP-registered physiotherapist and is often started from 10-14 days post-operatively. Local registered physiotherapists can be found at [www.acpat.org](http://www.acpat.org) and [www.rampregister.org](http://www.rampregister.org)

Hydrotherapy can also be beneficial in certain cases. Local registered hydrotherapists can be found at [www.canine-hydrotherapy.org](http://www.canine-hydrotherapy.org) and [www.narch.org.uk](http://www.narch.org.uk).



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**Key points:**

- Elizabethan collar worn at all times until incision is healed (approximately 2 weeks)
- Strict crate restriction for 10 days
- Encourage exercise and use of hind limbs after 10 days
- Adequate pain-relief is required for comfort during the post-operative period
- Stop medication and contact vet if any vomiting/diarrhoea
- Recheck appointments at 7-10 days, 4 weeks and 8 weeks
- Any concerns or questions, please do not hesitate to contact the clinic