

## Post-operative care following fracture repair

### **What is involved in fracture repair surgery?**

When a bone is fractured, stability is required in order for the bone to heal. This is often achieved by surgical alignment of the bone fragments and stabilisation with metal implants placed internally. These implants will take the load from the bone allowing it to heal, and it is important they are not overloaded during this time otherwise they can break. As such, exercise restriction is imperative for up to three months.

Most implants will not require removal once the bone has healed and will stay in place without issues throughout your cat's life. In certain circumstances they can require removal once the bone has healed, for example if they cause irritation or if there is any evidence of infection.

### **Exercise**

To allow for healing of the bone and to reduce the risk of complications such as implant failure, it is very important that your cat is kept under strict rest over the next 8 weeks, until x-rays are taken. Patients should be restricted to a large crate for at least the first 6 weeks. This crate should be large enough to accommodate a bed, litter tray, place to hide and food/water bowl. Placing a blanket over one side of the crate can create a sense of a safer space for your cat and pheromone plug-ins such as *Feliway* or *Pet Remedy* can help reduce stress during this time.

Running, jumping and climbing stairs or furniture should all be avoided for 12-weeks post-operatively.

Depending on your cat's progress at the recheck appointment at 4 weeks, access to a single room of the house is usually allowed from 6 weeks, without any high furniture that they can jump on.

Once bone-healing has been noted on the 8-week post-operative X-rays, access to the rest of the house is often advised, followed by access to outside after 12 weeks. Most patients can return to unrestricted exercise by 12 weeks post-operatively.

### **Wound care**

Some 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, which is especially important in orthopaedic surgery where sterile implants have been used.

The skin stitches are placed internally and are dissolvable so do not require removal. It is recommended that your cat 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, with food unless otherwise stated, and please stop these immediately if you notice any signs of vomiting or diarrhoea. Other medications such as buprenorphine given under the tongue may also be prescribed. Your vet/nurse will explain the specific medications for your pet when they are discharged.

### **What to expect**

Most cats start to place weight on the affected limb within 5 days of surgery, with a gradual improvement in comfort and limb-use over the following 8 weeks. A limp is often still present at 4 weeks post-operatively, but this should again improve over time. This limp usually resolves by 8-12 weeks post-operatively, with most cats going back to a normal active and athletic lifestyle without the need for further medication. However, the post-operative levels of lameness can vary depending on the specific nature of the fracture.

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

If there is any deterioration in the lameness or swelling, particularly if there is a sudden non-weight bearing lameness, then please contact your vet.

### **Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy**

Physiotherapy may be undertaken, ideally with an ACPAT or RAMP-registered physiotherapist. This is usually started from 2-4 weeks 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. This can start following physiotherapy and after the 8-week post-operative X-rays. 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).



### Key points

- Elizabethan collar worn at all times until incision is healed (approximately 2 weeks)
- Crate, pen or small room restriction until recheck at 6 weeks
- X-rays at 8 weeks
- No running, jumping and climbing stairs/furniture for 12-weeks
- 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