

## Arthrodesis Recovery Guide

### 1 Introduction

Your pet has just had an arthrodesis - so what is this and how can we make sure that they recover well from the surgery? An arthrodesis is the surgical fusing of a joint. It results in a stable and pain-free joint but a joint which has no movement in it.

It is used where there is severe injury to a joint or to the ligaments or tendons supporting the joint. The aim of the surgery is to convert the small joint spaces within the wrist or ankle joint into one fused bone.

To achieve this, the cartilage lining the joints is removed, and a bone graft (taken from the higher up the limb) is packed within the joint. To keep the joint as stable as possible while fusion occurs, the small bones have been held together with a stainless steel plate and several screws.

The bones in the joint are quite small, so the plates and screws are also small. To prevent the plate and/or screws from failing to support the joint, they have been supported on the outside with a bandage with a stiff cast over the top.

While the bone is healing we need to be very careful to make sure that no excessive force or trauma is placed on the bone or the implants supporting it which could lead to further damage to the bone or failure of the implants. This may necessitate further difficult and costly surgery.



The best way to ensure good healing is to keep your pet under control at all times until the joint has fused is healed and the bone has knitted together. This process usually takes 8-12 weeks. Before your pet comes home, you should determine where you are going to confine them during this post-surgery period;

- A crate that is large enough that they can stand up and turn around comfortably.
- Confinement to a small room eg. utility room.
- A cordoned off area of a larger room (not suitable for cats)

Any time your pet is out of this confined area, they should be on a lead so that you always have control over their movements.

Surfaces such as wooden floors, tile etc. can be very slippery. We suggest that you place some rugs with rubber backing or yoga mats on these surfaces to make it easier for your pet to walk around.

| Do's   | Don'ts   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take your dog on short lead walks outside to go to the toilet</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow your dog to jump up and down from couches or beds.</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow all bandage care instructions carefully if your pet has a bandage following surgery</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow any active play, off lead walks or play with other dogs until at x-rays show full healing of the joint. (Usually 8-12 weeks)</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact your vet if you have any concerns</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow your pet to lick or rub at the wound. Use the buster collar provided at all times until the wound is healed</li> </ul>                  |

After the surgery, your pet is going to limp on the surgically repaired leg for a period of time. It will take a little time for them to get used to the joint not moving as it once did but they will learn to use the other joints in the limb to adapt their gait.

Your pet should be placing some weight on the surgical leg (even just touching toes to the floor) within 7 days from the date of the surgery. Exercise will be restricted to just walks outside to the toilet while the bandage is in place.

The lameness should only improve as time goes on. If you see a deterioration in your pet's lameness then please contact your vet, particularly if they become non-weight bearing suddenly.

### 3 Wound and Bandage Care

Your pet will have dissolvable sutures placed in the surgical incision, these won't be visible from the outside and do not need to be removed. We recommend that your vet or nurse examines the wound 7-10 days after surgery, when the bandage is being changed to ensure the healing process is going well.

In most cases following arthrodesis, a bandage or cast will be placed to support the surgical repair. This bandage will be changed every 7-14 days to make sure there are no pressure sores or skin problems with the total bandage time of 8 weeks in most cases.

Some pets may need sedation to have their bandage changed so check this with your vet prior any appointments in case your pet needs to be fasted for this.

Maintaining excellent bandage care should allow less frequent bandage changes with fewer complications likely, saving you time and money.

| Do's  | Don'ts  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep the bandage clean and dry</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allow your pet to lick or chew at the bandage. Use a buster collar if necessary.</li></ul>    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Place a plastic bag/covering over the bandage temporarily if going outside in wet weather</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leave the plastic bag/covering on all the time as the paw will get sweaty and damp.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Watch for signs of swelling or redness around the bandage</li></ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hesitate to contact your vet if you have any concerns</li></ul>                               |

There are unfortunately quite a few things that can go wrong underneath bandages (pressure sores, reduced blood supply, skin infections, adhesive material irritation), splints and casts. To decrease the risk of complications, PLEASE call your vet if:

- You notice loosening or slippage of the bandage

- Your pet has tolerated a bandage well and suddenly starts to chew or bite at its bandage - this may indicate that the bandage is too tight and causing pressure sores
- You can't remember when the bandage is due to be changed
- There is a bad smell coming from the bandage
- The bandage becomes wet, moist or dirty
- Your pet becomes listless, distressed or seems uncomfortable



## **Timeline for recovery**

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Fusion of the joint is a procedure which requires considerable time to occur. In most pets this will take 8-12 weeks. We will usually perform x-rays of the joint at 8 weeks post-surgery to assess healing and possibly repeat these x-rays at 12 weeks.

During this time we don't recommend exercising your pet except for very short walks, on a short lead, outside to go to the toilet 3-4 times a day. This can be difficult for some patients but you can try to distract or entertain your pet in other ways which don't involve walking.

For example, chew toys, puzzle feeders and Youtube is full of videos about helping your pet through crate rest. We can also prescribe some calming medication if necessary.

Once the joint has fused, your pet should be able to go back to full exercise as normal before surgery. The fused joint should be very strong and resistant to running, jumping etc but this process takes time and patience.