PARTIAL CARPAL ARTHRODESIS: AT HOME CARE

Your pet has had surgery for the treatment of severely damaged ligaments of the carpus (wrist). The aim of the surgery is to convert the small joint spaces within the wrist into one fused bone. This replaces the function of the damaged ligaments. To achieve this, the cartilage has been removed, and a bone graft (taken from the humerus) has been packed within the wrist. To keep the wrist as stable as possible while fusion occurs, the small bones have been held together with a stainless steel plate and several screws. Implant removal is generally not necessary, but sometimes they need to be taken out once the bone has healed if they cause some irritation. The bones in the wrist are quite small, so the plates and screws are also small. To prevent the plate and/or screws from failing to support the wrist, they have been supported on the outside with a bandage with a stiff cast over the top.

It is essential for the success of the surgery that your pet is kept strictly confined and quiet for the next 8-12 weeks while the bones heal. Any overuse of the limb, especially without the support of the cast, can result in the plate and screws failing, which will necessitate a revision surgery. This can be very difficult and costly. Most patients will be putting some weight on the leg within ten days post-surgery. There should be a progressive increase in weight-bearing over the following weeks.

Together with us, you are responsible for the outcome of the surgery. To help ensure a good outcome, it is essential that you care for your pet at home by following these instructions explicitly. Any early over-use of the limb could result in implant failure, which can necessitate a revision surgery. Please contact us if you are at all concerned during your pet’s recovery.

Re-examination
Re-examination is advised in 4 days (but sooner if you are concerned) to:

- Remove the fentanyl patch
- Replace the dressing &/or cast
- Examine the wound

There is often some bruising and swelling around the surgery site; this is normal and should resolve uneventfully. The bandage will need to be changed every 7-10 days to make sure there are no pressure sores or skin problems. Or have it changed sooner if it becomes smelly, wet, slips, or bothers your pet. Please make an appointment to drop your pet off for a day stay for follow-up x-rays in 4 weeks and again in 8 weeks; we will assess the degree of recovery. Please note there is a small additional fee for the follow up x-rays.

Medications

- Anti-inflammatory: ____________________ Label instructions on the packet should be followed.
- Analgesic patch (fentanyl). This will be removed at the 4 day recheck.
- Tramadol tablets - Label instructions on the packet should be followed.
- ____________________
- ____________________

Post-operative exercise
Strict rest (no free exercise allowed) for the next 8-12 weeks is necessary to allow stabilisation of the joint. This means your pet should be confined to a crate for the entire duration of this period. For most patients, this is a difficult time. Pets that are used to free roaming around the house and yard can unfortunately become a bit distressed and even depressed. Thankfully, the strict confinement period is only for about two months, and after that, an increasing amount
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of freedom may be permitted. The exact timing of this will be determined by the follow up radiographs and patient assessment. Please try to keep your pet on flat surfaces only, and not on slippery surfaces (e.g. tiles and polished floors). Consider putting down rugs or non-slip matting (which can be purchased by the metre from hardware stores). During the rehabilitation period, daily food intake should be reduced by approximately one-third to prevent your pet putting on more weight while not exercising. This is VERY important for the long-term success of the surgery and to help reduce the strain placed on other joints. Free activity is not advised until after the rehabilitation program has finished.

Prognosis
Your pet has a good chance of improvement in lameness. Most patients make an excellent recovery within three to six months of surgery. There is the possibility of implant failure or loosening, infection, or fractures. Should you notice that your pet is lame after recovering from the surgery, or if you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Additional information about bandage and cast care
Bandages protect wounds and surgery sites from the animal’s instinct to lick or bite at the affected area. Splints and casts are designed to protect an injured limb and/or surgery to an injured limb by taking weight off the leg through immobilisation. Your pet may attempt to remove the bandage or splint by biting or chewing at the material. Fortunately, most animals will tolerate such devices quite well if they are not too uncomfortable. If your pet tries to bite or chew the bandage material, please ensure that an Elizabethan Collar (E-Collar) is fitted whenever your pet is unsupervised. For cats in particular, it’s important to give them some SUPERVISED time to groom daily, but make sure your cat doesn’t attempt to chew or bite at the bandage – they are allowed to groom everywhere else. Once the grooming session has finished, please ensure to re-fit the E-collar.

Basics of Home Care
Keep the bandage clean and dry. If your pet goes outside in wet weather, be sure to place a plastic bag over the bandage temporarily so that none of the materials get damp or wet. DO NOT leave plastic bags on all the time, as sweaty paws will dampen the bandage and necessitate a bandage change. Watch for signs of swelling above and below the bandage (if the toes have been left exposed) and feeling the toes twice daily to ensure there is good sensation and that the toes are warm and not swollen. Please inform your regular veterinarian of any loosening or slippage of the bandage. If your pet’s toes are visible at the bottom of the bandage, make sure they are not swollen. Restrict exercise for dogs to very short leash walks for toileting purposes while wearing the splint/bandage. Confine dogs indoors, preferably in a small room. For cats, please confine to a crate or small run. Excessive activity delays healing and will result in more frequent bandage changes, which will incur additional costs. Discourage your pet from licking and chewing at the bandage. If consult your veterinarian and needs to be checked by our technicians or doctors. Be sure you know when your regular veterinarian would like to have the bandage removed or changed and set up an appointment for that day. There are unfortunately quite a few things that can go wrong underneath bandages (pressure

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sores, reduced blood supply, skin infections, adhesive material irritation, splints and casts. To decrease the risk of complications, PLEASE call your regular veterinarian if:

- you can’t remember when the bandage is due to be changed
- your pet has tolerated a bandage well and suddenly starts to chew or bite at its bandage - this may indicate that its too tight and causing pressure sores
- the bandage has any odour
- the bandage becomes wet, moist, dirty, or slips down
- You notice red marks/pressure sores at the top and/or bottom of the bandage
- your pet becomes listless, distressed or seems uncomfortable
- you just aren’t sure if it looks or “feels right”

Tips to help a speedy recovery

- Use all medications as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Be sure to follow all activity restriction instructions from your veterinarian.

Longer-term follow-up and care

At around 4 and 8 weeks post-operatively, a radiograph of the carpus should be taken to assess the progress of healing. All going well, controlled exercise on a leash may begin after the 8 week radiographs. Once the bandage /cast have been removed and your pet has been given the all clear by your vet, gentle exercises can be started. Rising from a laying down position should also begin once the cast has been removed. This can be achieved by asking your pet to rise from laying down (a treat is helpful!) and then lying down from sitting up. This routine is repeated 10 or more times a few times a day and has the effect of strengthening the muscles and other soft tissue structures that help support the bones and joints, which is very important in rehabilitation following fracture surgery.

Leash walks should be minimal at first (10-15 minutes twice daily), and then gradually increased to 30 to 40 minutes twice daily. Deep-water swimming for 10 to 15 minutes several times a week, if possible, is excellent therapy at this stage. Free exercise off the lead is not advised until after the rehabilitation program has finished.

By 16 weeks, your pet should have returned to near normal activity, albeit with some restricted range of motion of the affected carpus. However, there is a large variation in how quickly individuals return to full function following fracture surgery. If there is not near normal activity by 16 weeks post-operatively, then please make an appointment for reassessment.

Rehabilitation program

While the surgery is important to alleviate pain and restore adequate function to your pets leg, of equal importance is the rehabilitation. Patients with little to no active rehabilitation invariably take much longer to return to function, or fail to return to full function. Here is a guide to what can be done to help return your pet to function as quickly as possible.

There are also several excellent rehabilitation consultants and veterinary physiotherapists in South-East Queensland that can help with your pets recovery. If you would like more information and contact details, please ask.

Weeks 1-2

- Strict rest and confinement
- Short leash walks (10 min max) in backyard only for toileting purposes only
- NO running, jumping or stairs!
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- Anti-inflammatory (eg Metacam®, Carprofen/Rimadyl®, Previcox®)
- Analgesic (e.g. Tramadol tablets, Fentanyl patch)
- Should be toe touching the ground intermittently
- Check bandage/cast daily for moisture and odour. Have bandage changed as needed.

**Week 3**
- Short leash walks (10 min max) in backyard only for toileting purposes only
- Should be taking a little weight on the leg.
- Check bandage/cast daily for moisture and odour. Have bandage changed as needed.

**Week 4**
- Check bandage/cast daily for moisture and odour. Have bandage changed as needed.
- Follow up x-rays to assess progress.

**Week 5-7**
- Check bandage/cast daily for moisture and odour. Have bandage changed as needed.

**Week 8**
- Follow up x-rays to assess progress.
- If the radiographs reveal good healing and your pet had made a good recovery, then the cast may be removed.
- You can start some CONTROLLED activity:
  - Hydrotherapy and/or swimming is the best form of controlled exercise, as it is supportive/buoyant and non-concussive on the legs
  - Alternatively, you can start short CONTROLLED leash walks. It is VERY important that this is performed under very controlled settings, as any uncontrolled activity may result in implant failure or prolonged recovery.
- Start with some physiotherapy and rise to sit exercises at home to warm up, then go to a grassed area (backyard, oval) and ON A LEASH, start slow paced walking.
- Use your pets’ comfort levels as a guide to how far or fast to walk. Most dogs by this time should be able to cope with 5 to 10 minutes walking once to twice daily. Do so for a week, then gradually increase the duration by 5 minutes per week. If there is any noticeable increase in lameness, then decrease the duration to the previous level, and maintain that level for an extra week before increasing the duration.

**Weeks 8-12**
- Continue physiotherapy and rise to sit exercises as often as possible each day.
- Hydrotherapy/swimming
- CONTROLLED LEASH walking – increase duration by about 5 minutes once to twice daily.
- If at any stage the lameness worsens or you are concerned, please contact us.

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Animal Physiotherapists with Hydrotherapy

Animal Physiotherapy Solutions
Lindsey Connell
14 The Centre at Springwood
Corner of Lexington & Logan Roads
Underwood  QLD  4119 Australia
http://vss.net.au/services/physiotherapy/

Brooke Marsh
431 Tanawha Tourist Drive
Tanawha, QLD 4556
Sunshine Coast
Australia
www.ncvs.net.au/3662_Therapists.html

Hydrotherapy

The Canine Fitness Centre
3385 6090
583 Oakey Flat Rd, Morayfield, 4506
www.caninefitnesscentre.com.au

Mobile Rehabilitation Therapist

Alpha Mobility Solutions
Dr Laurence Oner
Based in Petrie QLD 4502
0421 169 107
info@alphamobility.com.au
www.alphamobility.com.au