



HEPBURN VETERINARY CLINIC

86 Main Road
Hepburn Springs, VIC. 3461

Dr Emma Tomkins BVSc (Hons)
ABN: 96832871157

Ph: (03) 5348 4851
Fax: (03) 5348 4575
E-mail: hvcet@westnet.com.au

LUXATING PATELLA

The patella is the bone commonly called the knee cap. Normal movement for the patella is to slide up & down within a groove on the femur (thigh bone, the bone above the knee joint) as the knee is bent and straightened. Sometimes a patella will luxate (dislocate), meaning it slips out of this groove to the side.

CAUSES

1. An inherited problem. In this case the patella usually luxates medially (towards the mid line of the patient i.e. to between the legs rather than towards the outside of a leg). The degree of patella luxation caused by poor conformation of the leg varies from a looser than usual patella that usually stays in place but luxates when being examined, to a patella that is permanently luxated and can't be manually replaced. The signs of patella luxation therefore also vary - from occasional 'skipping' where the leg is carried with the knee bent for one or more steps, to significant lameness. These signs are usually evident from a young age, however mild cases may not be noticed by owners until arthritis develops. This occurs at a younger than usual age causing more obvious significant lameness. Conformation problems cause luxating patellae most commonly in toy and miniature dog breeds, for example chihuahuas, toy and miniature poodles, maltese, shih tzus. As this is a genetic problem, breeding of dogs with this problem should be avoided. Around 50% of patients will have the problem in both knees, and around 15-20% of patients with chronic patella luxations will also rupture of their cranial cruciate ligament. Patella luxation of this type usually worsens over time.
2. Trauma, such as a hard knock to the knee, with the patella luxating to one or both sides and signs of sudden onset lameness, pain and swelling, are usually seen.

TREATMENT

All patella luxations other than the most mild cases require surgical correction. More severe cases suffer constant pain and lameness. All cases, even the mild cases that don't appear as much of a problem for the young pet will develop early arthritis from the constant abnormal rubbing of bone, gradually wearing away the cartilage lining the bone. Arthritis can be very painful and prevention by surgical correction of the problem is desirable.

Surgery usually only involves a single day stay in the hospital. The degree of patella luxation determines the degree of repair performed. In all cases the knee joint is opened, then internal repair performed and the whole area tightened as the joint is closed. If concurrent cranial cruciate ligament rupture is present this is also repaired while the joint is open. Pain relief is usually administered, bandages are sometimes applied for the first couple of days, and many patients need to wear an Elizabethan collar around their necks

to prevent them licking and chewing at the surgery site. If both knees are affected and the patient is a small dog we may recommend surgery on both knees at the same time. Making both hind legs sore at the same time may seem unkind, but it actually improves recovery for many small dogs. This is because they find it easy to move around on 3 legs, and avoid using the operated on leg 'just in case'. Early gentle movement is important and is often much easier to achieve in little dogs when both legs are a bit sore and they have no choice but to use them. Pain relief is given to minimise pain and encourage movement.

POST OPERATIVE CARE

Home care after surgery is an important part of recovery. For the first two weeks after surgery until the skin wound heals it important to check this wound daily. If your pet is not using the leg gentle bending and straightening the leg is recommended as physiotherapy. If he is short, gentle, slow leash walks on even ground surfaces should begin. Exercise must be carefully restricted to prevent injury. After the first two weeks swimming is excellent exercise for the leg, as it is non weight bearing and reduces the chance of slipping and injuring the leg as well as forcing those reluctant patients to start using the leg again. The healing time ranges from around 4-10 weeks depending on the surgical techniques needed for repair. Overweight pets put extra stress on all joints and should be brought back to normal weight. Please discuss your pets weight with our staff to ensure weight loss is achieved if required.