



MAINLIACHT SURGICAL DISCHARGE

Post-operative guidance

Robert Murray

B. Sc (Hons) Biomed, DVM (Hons), MRCVS

Complex Small Animal Surgery
Orthopaedic and Soft Tissue

- Complex Surgery
- Cruciate Disease
- Patellar Luxation
- Fracture Repair
- BOAS / TECA-LBO



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Arthrodesis Surgery Discharge Sheet

Procedure Summary

Your pet has undergone arthrodesis surgery, which involves permanent fusion of a joint. This procedure is performed when a joint is severely damaged and cannot be restored to normal function due to trauma, instability, ligament failure, or advanced degenerative disease.

During surgery, the joint cartilage has been removed and the bones have been stabilised using metal implants such as plates and screws. A bone graft may also have been placed to encourage bone healing.

Over time, the bones fuse together to form a single solid structure. This eliminates pain from the diseased joint but results in permanent loss of movement at that joint.

This procedure is most commonly performed at the carpus or tarsus. The aim is to create a stable, pain-free limb rather than restore normal joint motion. Strict protection of the limb is essential until fusion is complete.

Complications

Common and expected complications include swelling, bruising, stiffness, and reduced weight-bearing during the early recovery period.

Occasional complications include wound irritation, superficial infection, dressing complications, or delayed healing.

Less common complications include implant irritation, loosening of implants, delayed bone fusion, or pressure-related complications associated with bandaging.

Rare but serious complications include implant failure, fracture of adjacent bones, deep infection requiring implant removal, failure of the bones to fuse, or the need for revision surgery.

Arthrodesis procedures carry a higher complication risk than many orthopaedic procedures, particularly if aftercare is not strictly followed.



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Medications

Medication	How to Give	Duration	Purpose
NSAID	With food	As prescribed	Pain relief and anti-inflammatory
Antibiotic	As directed	As prescribed	Infection prevention (if indicated)
Additional analgesia	As directed	Short course	Post-operative comfort

All medications should be given exactly as prescribed. Anti-inflammatory medications should be given with food and may occasionally cause vomiting or diarrhoea. If this occurs, contact the practice for advice. Do not administer any human medications.

Wound and Dressing Care

Care of dressings and bandages is critical to successful healing. The surgical site and any dressings must be kept clean and completely dry at all times. Dressings should not be interfered with or changed at home unless specifically instructed.

You should monitor the limb daily for swelling above or below the bandage, slipping or loosening of the dressing, discharge, unpleasant odour, or signs of discomfort such as chewing or restlessness. If any of these occur, veterinary attention should be sought immediately.

An Elizabethan collar must be worn to prevent interference with the surgical site and dressings.



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Activity and Rehabilitation

Strict activity restriction is essential until bone fusion is confirmed. During the early recovery period, your pet should be confined indoors and exercise limited to short, controlled lead walks for toileting only.

Activity should be gradually increased in a controlled manner over the following weeks, but running, jumping, and climbing must be prevented. Uncontrolled activity can result in implant failure or fracture and may require further surgery.

Progression to normal activity is only permitted once bone fusion has been confirmed.

Physiotherapy and Recovery

Rehabilitation focuses on maintaining strength in the rest of the limb and helping your pet adapt to altered joint mechanics.

Physiotherapy may be beneficial to maintain muscle mass, support surrounding joints, and improve overall limb function. Hydrotherapy can be introduced once the wound and any bandaging allow and provides controlled, low-impact strengthening.

Rehabilitation is tailored to support adaptation to a limb with reduced joint movement.

Home Care and Environment

Your pet should be kept in a controlled environment during recovery. Slippery surfaces, stairs, and furniture should be avoided, and non-slip flooring is recommended.

Movement should be controlled at all times, and rough activity must be prevented. Body weight should be carefully managed, as excess weight places additional stress on the surgical repair.



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Monitoring at Home

You should observe gradual improvement in comfort and limb use over time. The limb should become more stable as healing progresses.

Any worsening lameness, changes in behaviour, or issues with dressings should be taken seriously and discussed with your veterinary practice.

When to Contact the Practice Immediately

Contact the practice without delay if you notice swelling, discharge, or wound breakdown, problems with dressings such as slipping or moisture, sudden worsening lameness, or signs of significant pain or distress.

Follow-Up and Prognosis

Re-examinations are typically required to monitor healing and manage dressings. Radiographs are usually performed between six and ten weeks following surgery to assess bone fusion.

Progression to increased activity is only permitted once adequate healing has been confirmed. Some cases may require extended immobilisation depending on the rate of healing.

Most patients achieve a stable, pain-free limb following arthrodesis. Changes in gait are expected due to loss of joint movement, particularly in high-motion joints.



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If you have any concerns at any stage, please contact your veterinary practice.

Kind regards

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Veterinary Surgeon

