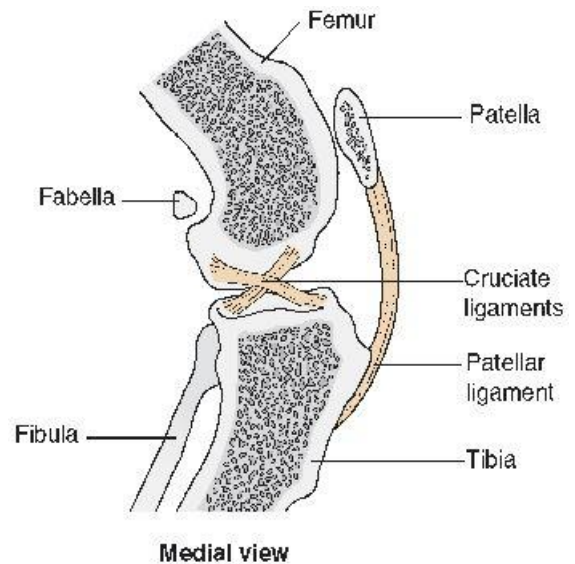


Cruciate ligament disease in dogs.

What is the cruciate ligament?

The cruciate ligament is actually comprised of two ligaments; the cranial cruciate ligament and the caudal cruciate ligament. Both are important ligaments within your dog's stifle (knee) joint. They help to stabilise the stifle joint. In dogs the caudal cruciate ligament rarely causes problems. It is the cranial cruciate ligament that is commonly diseased or injured.



What causes cruciate ligament disease?

Cruciate ligament problems occur in one of two ways.

1-The cruciate ligament degenerates (wears out) gradually over time until it tears or breaks. This tends to happen in large or giant breed dogs. You will probably notice your dog being mildly lame on one or both of their hind limbs. It tends to be worse after rest or vigorous exercise. The lameness tends to get worse over time.

2-An injury causes the cruciate ligament to rupture. This can happen in any breed of dog and can occur during active exercise or after falling or twisting awkwardly. You will notice your dog go suddenly very lame on one of their hind limbs. They normally can't put any weight on their leg at all.

How is cruciate disease diagnosed?

Your vet may be able to diagnose cruciate disease by performing an orthopaedic examination on your dog's leg. However cruciate disease can be very painful so some dogs don't allow a thorough leg examination to be performed. We often need to anaesthetise your dog and perform an orthopaedic examination whilst your dog is under the anaesthetic. We also normally take x-rays of your dog's stifles to check for evidence of osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis commonly occurs alongside cruciate disease.



My dog has been diagnosed with cruciate ligament disease-what now?

Once ruptured, the cruciate ligament cannot be repaired. Most dogs will require surgery to treat their cruciate problem. There are three main surgical options to treat cruciate disease and your vet will discuss which option would be most appropriate for your dog. One surgical option consists of replacing the function of the cruciate ligament with a strong wire implant or two other surgical options that both alter the angle of the stifle joint to provide stability. We perform one of the surgeries here at Chestnuts, however in some circumstances your dog may be referred to a specialist orthopaedic surgeon.

Your dog will need to be rested prior to surgery - your vet will advise you on how much exercise is appropriate. Your vet will prescribe pain relief/anti-inflammatory medication to keep your dog comfortable before and after their surgery. Please follow the instructions on the medicine carefully and do not exceed the stated dose. Common side effects of this type of medication are vomiting and diarrhoea. If this occurs please stop the medication and contact your vet. Do not give your dog 'human' painkillers or anti-inflammatories. These can be extremely toxic and dangerous to dogs.

What else can I do to help my dog?

Make sure your dog is a healthy weight. This is the most important thing you can do to help your dog.

Your vet will advise you if your dog needs to lose weight. The less weight your dog is carrying the quicker their recovery will be and the better their stifle function will be in the long term. Our nurses run free weight clinics which offer a wealth of advice and support to aid your dog's weight loss. Please call the practice for more details.

Joint supplements may also be appropriate for your dog. Please see the joint supplement information sheet for more details. Hydrotherapy and physiotherapy are also helpful during your dog's recovery, please ask your vet for more details.

What is the recovery period after surgery?

Strict rest is normally recommended for 2 weeks after surgery. For the following 6 weeks gradually increasing controlled lead exercise is needed. Each dog is different and some will recover quicker than others. Your dog will normally be back to normal exercise 3-6months after the surgery.



What is the long term outcome likely to be for my dog?

Most dogs will go on to lead a normal life. However, it is important to be aware that there will inevitably be osteoarthritis in your dog's stifle joint in the long term, and there is an increased risk of re-injury to the knee, or occurrence in the other knee. Some dogs may not be able to exercise for as long as they used to, or perform to such a high intensity i.e. agility type exercise may result in lameness. Most dogs will require ongoing care of their stifle joint. This normally involves a combination of controlled exercise, anti-inflammatory medication, joint supplements, hydrotherapy or physiotherapy and weight control. Your vet will discuss and design a long term plan for your dog.

Please ask your vet if you have any questions regarding your dog's cruciate disease.