Post Surgical Care of Elbow Fractures

Home patient care after orthopedic surgery is critical to the success of the surgery. Allowing your pet too much activity may alter the anticipated outcome of the surgery. Remember, a fracture near or in a joint is a severe orthopedic injury and although surgery is necessary to reduce future arthritis and minimize pain and healing time, the elbow may never be “good as new” except for simple supracondylar fractures. Simple condylar or supracondylar fractures have a good prognosis while bilateral condylar fractures, either Y or T fractures, have a fifty fifty chance of healing well.

The following instructions will be your guide to home care.

**Week 1:**

1. Provide pain management with NSAID’s the first five days
2. Apply an ice-pack to the elbow for 10 to 15 minutes two to four times a day for the first 24 to 36 hours after surgery if no bandage
3. If inflammation has resolved after 72 hours, apply a hot-pack to the elbow for 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a day if no bandage
4. Complete confinement is imperative for the first six weeks until healing is progressed utilizing a leash to go outside at all times
5. No running, jumping, playing, stairs, free roaming of home or yard
6. Perform passive range of motion exercise (gently flex and extend the elbow); 10 slow repetitions three times a day
7. Precede and follow the passive range of motion exercise with massage of the biceps and triceps (large muscles above the elbow)
8. Begin slow leash walks of less than 10 minutes three times a day

**Weeks 2 & 3:**

1. After the bandage is removed, apply a hot pack to the elbow for 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a day until the swelling has resolved
2. Stop passive range of motion exercise if your pet is using the leg correctly
3. Increase the slow leash walks to 10 to 20 minutes three times a day
4. Continue massage
5. Schedule a recheck with your doctor 2 weeks after surgery to remove any sutures and evaluate range of motion and percent weight bearing
6. Most patients begin to bear some weight by week 2, but every pet is different and some may take longer

**Weeks 4:**
1. Increase the slow leash walks to 20 to 30 minutes two or three times daily
2. If available, swimming exercises for one to three minutes twice a day is helpful

**Week 5 and 6:**

1. Schedule another recheck with your doctor four weeks after surgery to evaluate your pet’s progress
2. Make an appointment for a radiograph at six weeks after surgery to evaluate healing
3. If your doctor feels your pet is healing well, then slowly increasing activity can be slowly introduced over the next few weeks.

**Week 6 through 12:**

1. Make an appointment for a radiograph at six weeks after surgery to evaluate healing
2. If your doctor feels your pet is completely healed, then normal activity can be slowly introduced over the next week or two.
3. If your pet has an IM pin, it may be removed at this time. Small pins and screws are normally not removed unless they are causing discomfort.

**Additional Instructions:**

1. Licking at the incision should be discouraged because it may lead to chewing at the sutures or staples causing a wound infection. It may be necessary to bandage the leg or use an Elizabethan collar to prevent licking.
2. Bandages, if used, should always be kept dry and clean. Any odors and/or persistent licking are indicators that there may be a potential problem and **should be checked by your veterinarian immediately.** Bandages and splints should be checked weekly by your veterinarian or veterinary technician.
3. Feed your pet its regular diet but reduce it by 10% to allow for reduced activity.
4. Mild swelling may occur near incision or low on limbs. Your veterinarian should check moderate or severe swelling immediately.
5. Use of a joint protective supplement with glucosamine and chondroitin is highly recommended for at least six months if your pet does not have arthritis. If your pet does have arthritis, it is recommended to use this supplement for the life of your pet.

**Complications**
As with any surgical procedure, complications can occur. Unlike human patients who can use a sling or crutches, our patients do not know enough to stay off a healing fracture so restricted activity is a major responsibility of you, the pet owner. Failure to follow these instructions carefully can lead to delayed healing or even failure of the implants.

The most common complication is delayed healing, where, despite our best efforts to stabilize the joint, individual patients respond slower than others. Occasionally, your pet may develop a small pocket of fluid called a seroma, around the incision. See your veterinarian if this swelling is larger than a grape. On rare occasions, the radial or ulnar nerve which provides sensation to the lower leg can be inadvertently injured.

If your pet seems to have serious leg pain or loss of sensation with foot dragging immediately after surgery, please notify me right away. With bicondylar fractures, implant failure and arthritis leading to further surgery is not uncommon. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask your veterinarian or call me at the number above.

Follow Up Instructions:

☐ Support/pressure bandage placed post-operatively to be removed in 2 3 4 5 days
☐ Recheck every two weeks: Sutures/Staples removal / Dissolving sutures
☐ Tegaderm clear bandage can be left on until it falls off or at suture removal
☐ Start antibiotic tonight
☐ Start pain medication tonight
☐ Start Cosequin, Glycoflex or Dasuquin (joint supplement) tomorrow
☐ Call Rod Newman, MS, CCRP to schedule physical therapy after suture removal to reduce recovery time at 615-414-4867 or email him at k9rehabnashville@cs.com