Post Surgical Care of Shoulder OCD

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. Since this disease involves the shoulder joint in a young dog, we must carefully balance the need for early use of the limb to prevent stiffening of the joint with too much activity that might injure the healing tissues in the surgery site.

The surgeon will make an incision into the shoulder joint, many times without cutting any muscles, just separating them. If the surgeon feels that muscles need to be cut to increase visualization of the joint, this will delay healing by a week or two. The surgeon will find the abnormal flap of cartilage in the joint and remove it. The margins of the flap will be inspected to be sure that all of the remaining cartilage is tightly adhered to the underlying bone. In some cases, we will drill very small holes into the bone that was under the flap in order to increase blood supply necessary for final healing. In some cases, the flap will already have broken free and if it can be safely retrieved from the back of the joint, the surgeon will remove it. In rare cases, the flap (joint mouse) will be adhered to the joint capsule and it can not be safely removed. Over time, this flap will usually dissolve in the joint fluids and not cause any problems.

The following instructions will be your guide to home care. For the first two weeks, your pet must be restricted to a leash when outdoors and no running, jumping, playing or stairs while indoors.

Week 1:

1. Provide pain management with NSAID’s the first five days
2. Apply an ice-pack to the shoulder for 10 to 15 minutes two to four times a day for the first 24 to 36 hours after surgery
3. If inflammation has resolved after 72 hours, apply a hot-pack to the shoulder for 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a day
4. Perform passive range of motion exercise (gently flex and extend the shoulder); 10 slow repetitions three times a day
5. Precede and follow the passive range of motion exercise with massage of the leg muscles (large muscles above the elbow)
6. Schedule a recheck with your doctor 1 week after surgery to evaluate range of motion, limb usage, and the incision.

Week 2:

1. Apply a hot pack to the shoulder for 10 to 15 minutes two or three times a
day until the swelling has resolved
2. Continue massage
3. Schedule a recheck with your doctor 2 weeks after surgery to remove any sutures and evaluate range of motion and limb usage.

Week 3:

1. Begin slow leash walks to 10 to 20 minutes two or three times daily
2. Recheck 3 weeks after surgery if your pet is not using the leg or improving week to week.

Weeks 4:

At this point, your pet’s healing should be complete and should gradually return to full activity by the end of 6 weeks.

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 to prevent any arthritis from forming in the joint.

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 leg so restricted activity is a major responsibility of you, the pet owner. Failure to follow these instructions carefully can lead to delayed healing.

There are important nerves surrounding the neck of the scapula and these can be damaged inadvertently during surgical manipulation. While most nerve damage is temporary, permanent damage can result in muscle atrophy and diminished limb use. Occasionally, your pet may develop a small pocket of fluid called a seroma, around
the shoulder joint. See your veterinarian if this swelling is larger than a grape. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask your veterinarian or call me at the number above.

Follow Up Instructions:

_____ Sutures/staples to be removed in two weeks
_____ Start antibiotic tonight/tomorrow
_____ Start pain medication tonight/tomorrow
_____ Start joint supplement tonight/tomorrow