

Cruciate Tears

What is it?

Cruciate ligaments are found in the stifle (knee) joint of dogs. Surprisingly dog knees are very similar to human knees. Cruciate ligaments are large and strong ligaments in the knee, keeping it stable and prevents inappropriate movements within the knee joint including hyperextension and excessive internal rotation.

What causes it?

When a cruciate ligament tear, the dog experiences sudden pain and often holds his leg up. The may put the leg down and start using the leg again within a day or so but will continue to limp for several weeks. Normally, at the end of several weeks, the initial pain subsides and the dog is willing to use its leg more, however the joint will remain unstable and the leg will be painful depending of the activity and exercise.

Longer term, when your dog puts his weight on the leg, the tibia (shin bone) slides forward in relationship to the femur (thigh bone). This can be very painful as the joint cartilage wears down, leading to arthritis. This motion can also put excessive stress on the meniscus (C shaped pieces of cartilage within the knee joint), causing damage or further tearing.



Signs & Symptoms

- Lameness and limping that can be sudden or gradual onset.
- Decreased weight-bearing on a hind-limb.
- Sometimes there is swelling on the inside of the knee joint.

How is it diagnosed?

Your veterinarian can diagnose a rupture cruciate ligament by feeling your dog's knee moving abnormally. The knee feels like it is moving like a drawer of a cabinet instead of being locked in place.

Prevention:

- Keep your dogs weight at the proper level
- Use joint support supplements (glucosamine, chondroitin, perna mussel etc.)
- Keeping your dog in good physical conditioning with good controlled exercise.

Some dogs are going to have cruciate tears no matter what you do to try to prevent it. The bottom line is to treat it if it happens.

Treatment

Complete tears are usually treated with surgery, which involves using a synthetic suture material, or a portion of adjacent fibrous tissue to basically re-create the ligament. Types of treatment include the extracapsular imbrication technique, fibular head transfer, tibial plateau leveling (TPLO).

The most important thing about the surgery is the after treatment that is required. Your dog's movement must be severely restricted for at least 2 weeks. As the number of days progress your dog will be able to put some weight on the on the affected leg and then want to running (the same way he/she got the tear in the first place) but it is really important to keep them restricted until the healing is complete. You must follow your veterinarian's advice to provide proper healing.

Sometimes a cruciate tear can be healed with medical treatment. Basically, the involves controlled swimming and walking, as instructed by a veterinarian to keep up and improve muscle strength.

Over weight dog need to go on a reduced-calorie diet to lose lose a few pounds and to take pressure off the knees. Your vet may also prescribe nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as carprofen, etodolac, meloxicam, deracoxib, buffered aspirin, or other medication to reduce the inflammation in the joint and relieve pain. Your veterinarian may also recommend products known as joint support supplements.

This information is not meant to be a substitute for veterinary care.

Always follow the instructions provided by your veterinarian.

Newfoundland Dog Health Fact Sheet produced by the NCA Health & Longevity Committee written by J. Cornell, copyright Newfoundland Club of America 2018