

Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO) Surgery

The TPLO is an extremely technique sensitive procedure requiring formal surgical training and exceptional orthopedic expertise, obligatory training and a substantial orthopedic caseload for proficiency. We at Atascadero Pet Hospital & Emergency Center are proud to have Aaron Schechter, DVM, who is a Certified TPLO Veterinarian.

Why would a dog need a TPLO surgery?

Cranial cruciate ligament (CrCL) insufficiency is considered the most common orthopedic problem in dogs. Dogs can rupture or strain their anterior cruciate ligament spontaneously, which causes the dog pain. The pain comes from an unstable joint that tends to slide each time weight is put on that leg. The tibia slides forward on the femur and irritates the tender cartilage.

How does a TPLO surgery work?

The surgeon make a round cut in the top (plateau) of the tibia. The surgeon rotates this round portion so that the femur comes down on a stable tibia. TPLO surgeries take 1-2 hours. Dogs having this surgery are usually more comfortable just 2-3 weeks after the surgery is performed and can go back to full and pain-free activity in 12 weeks.

What happens after a TPLO surgery?

Slocum® Post-Operative Care for Orthopedic Surgery

1. Your pet can be inside, on carpeted surfaces, under your direct supervision. It can wander around the room at a slow walk as long as it is not constant. Running, jumping, bounding, playing, etc., are not allowed.
2. Your pet must be on a leash at all times when outside for airing and going to the bathroom. If the animal has to cross slick floors or uneven ground, you need to use a "belly-band" in case it slips or stumbles. The "belly-band" is not used for support but rather as a safety net to protect your pet. Your pet is not allowed to be off lead when outside or to go for an actual walk.
3. When not under direct supervision, your pet is to be confined in an airline kennel or equivalent.

General Information

- Playing with other animals is not allowed during confinement. If there are other pets in the household, you will need to keep them separated.
- During confinement, your pet's food intake needs to be reduced to help prevent weight gain. Most dogs will maintain their current weight if their food intake is cut in half. Water consumption should remain normal.
- The first two weeks following surgery you will need to monitor your pet's incisions. Licking or chewing can cause infection or sutures to loosen. If you notice that your pet has started licking, you will need to take steps to discourage it from doing so.
- It takes a minimum of six to eight weeks for bones to heal.
- One of the most difficult aspects of confinement is that the animals will frequently feel better long before they are healed. At this point your pet will start being more careless of the operated limb and is then more likely to be overactive and injure itself. Until the bone is healed, you must adhere strictly to the confinement guidelines and not allow your pet to do more.
- If your pet is jumping or bouncing in its confined area, it is being too active. Tranquilizers may be required to help alleviate your pet's anxiety or control its activity.
- If at any time during your pet's recovery and healing it does anything that causes it to cry out or give a sharp yelp, contact your veterinarian.
- Following surgery your pet should always maintain at its current level of function, or improve. If at any time during your pet's recovery and healing it has a set back or decrease in function, contact your veterinarian.
- If your pet is too active during its confinement it may injure itself or slow healing which increases the amount of time your pet must be confined.
- Follow up appointments are usually needed two weeks post-operatively to monitor incisions and healing. At six to eight weeks post-operatively radiographs are taken at which time your pet is started on a regulated activity regime. A final appointment at four months post-operatively is needed for additional radiographs and final instructions before returning your pet to normal activity. For eight to twelve weeks following surgery, a strict confinement regime is required with three important principles.

Please call (805) 466-3880 for an appointment or stop by if there is an emergency

Slocum® Rehabilitation Regime

Once radiographs have confirmed bone healing, usually around eight weeks post-operatively, the rehabilitation regime is initiated. During this period the patient's activities are gradually increased to build muscle, stretch scar tissue from surgery, and strengthen bone healing. The degree of activity should progress with your pet remaining comfortable. Since increasing duration, not intensity is the goal, explosive activities, such as running, jumping or playing, are not allowed during the rehabilitation period.

Throughout the rehabilitation process the dog is allowed to go as far as it is able while remaining comfortable. To judge your pet's comfort, watch the dog when it gets up following exercise and rest. If invigorated and excited about more activity, the animal is comfortable. If the dog gets up with stiffness and complaint, then the amount of activity should be reduced.

The first three to four weeks of rehabilitation are comprised of progressively longer walks with the animal on a short lead, in the heel position. Begin with a five-minute walk, and see how the dog responds. If the dog does well, continue at this distance for three to four days. If the animal remains comfortable during this time, double the distance of the walk. Monitor the dog's comfort and after three to four days, double the distance of the walk again. Continue doubling the distance of the walk every few days as the dog's comfort level permits. If the animal appears to be uncomfortable with the increased distance, cut the length of the walk back to the last distance at which it was comfortable; go for another few days at the lesser distance, then try doubling again.

Your pet will benefit more from several short walks in one day rather than a single long walk, so instead of doubling the length of a walk, you can double the number of walks. Rather than going for one 10 minute walk to one 20 minute walk, go for two 10 minute walks instead. Your pet will still be getting twice the activity, but it will be split up throughout the day. You can continue doubling the distance or number of walks as your schedule and your pet's comfort allows. If your pet likes the water, you may substitute a swim for a walk at any time, allowing the swim for the same length of time as the walk you are replacing.

During the fourth through the sixth week of rehabilitation, the walks are continued with your dog on a long lead, such as a 10-15 foot leash or a flexi lead. You will need to cut back the length of the walks you are currently going on, as the longer lead allows the dog the freedom to trot back and forth, increasing its usage of the leg. Usually we recommend that you quarter the distance you are currently going on the short lead walks. Once you know where your pet's comfort level is, you will double the amount of activity every few days. As distances are more difficult to judge at this point, it is important to monitor the dog's comfort level closely during this stage of rehabilitation.

During the seventh through the ninth week of rehabilitation your pet is allowed very mild activity off lead. You will continue with the long lead walks and you will start letting your pet have time off lead in the yard, under your supervision. The area should have no other animals or distractions around. The off lead activity should occur after your pet has had a walk to get some energy out of its system. Start with five minutes off lead following a walk. As with the walks, double the time your pet is spending off lead in the yard every few days as long as your pet's comfort level permits. The dog should remain under the voice control of its owner at all times. No jumping, chasing a ball, Frisbee, or playing with other animals is permitted. Avoid any activities where the dog's full concentration is thrown into the activity without regard for its body.

A final checkup at the end of the rehabilitation process is needed before full activity may be resumed.