

Limping (Lameness)

Lameness refers to an inability to properly use one or more limbs and can affect pets of any age. Lameness can be acute (sudden), chronic (persisting for over two weeks), or recurrent (meaning it comes and goes).

The most common causes of lameness in dogs and cats are:

- Soft tissue injury/trauma to the muscles, tendons or ligaments.
- Injury to a joint.
- Bone fracture.
- Dislocation.
- Flare up of a pre-existing condition such as arthritis or hip dysplasia.
- Less common causes include: bone or joint infections, immune-mediated diseases, or cancer.

INVESTIGATION INTO THE CAUSE OF THE LAMENESS

- Finding the cause of a pet's lameness usually starts with a complete history and physical examination.
- Your pet's history includes details such as whether the lameness occurred suddenly or came on gradually, whether trauma was involved, whether more than one limb is affected, whether the lameness is constant or comes and goes, and whether there are other signs of illness.
- The physical examination includes assessment of the pet's overall health as well as close inspection of the affected limb(s) or joint(s). Your veterinarian is looking for evidence of trauma such as bruising or wounds, as well as signs of soreness such as swelling, heat, redness, pain, or reduced ability to move a joint or limb.
- If a pet appears to be healthy except for lameness, the first diagnostic test will likely be to take x-rays of the sore area. If there is joint pain, then joint fluid analysis may also be recommended.
- If the pet has additional signs of illness, such as fever, poor appetite, lethargy, or weight loss, then underlying systemic illness may be present and screening tests may be recommended. Screening tests are a series of simple tests that assess the overall health of a pet. The most common screening tests include a complete blood count (CBC), a serum biochemistry profile, and a urinalysis.

A note on ruptured cruciate ligaments

For dogs, if pain is found only in the knee of the hind leg, a ruptured or torn cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) may be the cause. When the CCL is damaged, the knee joint becomes loose and moves in an abnormal way called a drawer sign. The drawer sign is more easily detected when the leg is completely relaxed and therefore, the test is often done with the pet under sedation or light general anaesthesia.

CHANGES IN YOUR PETS LAMENESS THAT REQUIRE US TO BE NOTIFIED:

- **Difficulty standing or walking:** This may indicate a severe injury or pain if the pet cannot bear weight on the injured limb.
- **Loss of balance:** This might signal a neurological problem that affects the coordination or sensation of the limbs.
- **Reluctance to move:** Joint stiffness or discomfort might mean a chronic condition requiring implementation of a multimodal treatment plan.
- **Behavioural changes:** Can include heightened irritability or lethargy, which can indicate pain or stress due to lameness.



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TREATING LAMENESS

- Surgery might be necessary in severe cases of lameness that involve bone fractures, joint dislocations, ligament tears, or tumours. The type of surgery depends on the location and severity of the damage. For example, a tibial plateau leveling osteotomy (TPLO) may stabilise the knee joint in dogs with cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) rupture.
- To relieve pain, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as meloxicam, may be recommended. These medications can help reduce inflammation and promote healing in mild lameness cases.
- Physical therapy improves the range of motion and strength of the joints and muscles in moderate lameness cases. A vet or certified canine rehabilitation therapist can recommend basic exercises, manual therapy, hydrotherapy or laser therapy.

Canine Rehabilitation Centre is located next to The Vet Lounge Coomera (4/2 Sierra Place, Upper Coomera). For more information please visit www.caninerehabcentre.com.au.

In each situation, a veterinarian's guidance is crucial to develop an appropriate treatment plan and ensure you administer the proper medication.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED TREATMENT PLAN

INVESTIGATION/TREATMENT OPTION	RECOMMENDATION	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Radiographs and examination under sedation or general anaesthesia		
Joint fluid assessment		
Blood and/or urine testing		
Surgery consultation		
Rehabilitation consultation		For more information, please visit www.caninerehabcentre.com.au
Medication	Type: Dose:	
Rest/exercise modification		

PROGRESS EXAMINATION REQUIRED: Date: _____ Time: _____



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