



ANTERIOR CRUCIATE LIGAMENT (ACL) SURGERY

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One of the most common orthopedic injuries in the dog is a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) in the stifle/knee. In humans this is typically a traumatic injury suffered from significant impact to the knee or lower leg. In dogs it is believed to be a twisting injury and can occur with minimal trauma or even no visible trauma. The job of the ACL is to prevent the shin bone (tibia) from sliding forward and prevent it from rotating internally. Dogs with torn ACL's (or strained/sprained ACL's) will often stand up on the toes with the foot turned in slightly. The diagnosis of an ACL injury can sometimes be made on physical exam and can often be confirmed with routine radiographs. Aside from getting to the vet to be evaluated, the first thing to do if you suspect a knee injury in your dog is to REST them. Strict rest means NO OFF LEASH ACTIVITY and if at all possible, no stairs.



There are two most popular methods of repairing a torn ACL. The first involves cleaning out the torn ligament, inspecting and removing damaged portions of the knee cartilage called menisci. Once the joint is cleaned out, the knee is stabilized by an artificial material placed on the outside of the knee between the end of the thigh bone and the top of the shin bone. It is placed on an angle to closely approximate the angle of the original ACL but on the outside of the knee rather than within the joint.

The joint clean out can be performed by opening the joint or via arthroscopy.

This lateral suture is the procedure performed here at NVH. We have nearly 20 years experience doing this procedure successfully on dogs from 7 lbs to 140 lbs. We do not have arthroscopy so open joint procedures are the only option with us. We are not orthopedic specialists but would be happy to discuss our qualifications with you.

The second procedure which was more recently developed and is often recommended over the lateral suture technique for dogs over 60 lbs is the Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy or TPLO. The TPLO involves cutting the bone and using a plate and screws to change the angle of the top of the shin bone so that the dog no longer needs an ACL. We do not do this procedure here at NVH. There are non-specialists who have become certified in this procedure and are performing it in private practice but in most cases, this procedure is performed by a board certified specialist in a specialty/referral hospital such as VSEC, CARES or the University of PA vet school. If you would like more information on this procedure and whether it would be better for your dog than the lateral suture technique, we would be happy to help you arrange a consult with an orthopedic specialist.

It is our opinion that not all dogs with torn ACL's require surgery. Some dogs like some people can recover and function well without an ACL. Rest and rehabilitation should be discussed with your veterinarian or veterinary specialist as well as the desired long term level

of activity so that you can decide what is best for your pet. It is important that you understand that we are not specialists. We perform this surgery currently 15 to 20 times per year. Many specialist do that many in a week! Specialists have completed a residency in the specialty and sat for and passed a board exam that allows them to call themselves “specialists”. In order to be a specialist in PA, you MUST be board certified in your area of specialty. You ALWAYS have the option to consult a specialist or schedule surgery with a specialist. We will assist you in any way we can.

Whether you have surgery performed here, with a specialist or elect to not do surgery at all, be sure to ask us about rehabilitative medicine for ACL injuries! Together we can get you buddies back on track as quickly as possible.

