



Photograph by Hilde Couse

LOOKING AT LUXATING PATELLA IN DOGS



Our vet answers questions posed by Margaret Stanton from Krugersdorp about Luxating Patella.

DR LARRY VAN NIEKERK

Dr Larry van Niekerk is a veterinary specialist surgeon, veterinary business consultant and speaker. He is founder and Chairman of the Institute for Veterinary Practice Development.

Q We've just been told by the vet that our little Yorkie has a luxating patella in both legs and needs surgery to repair the condition. We'd noticed that her back leg joints "popped" when she walks and first thought it might have something to do with her hips.

She had some x-rays taken and we were shown that there is no groove at the end of the bone where the kneecap would normally sit, causing it to flip from side to side over the bone resulting in the popping motion.

Would you please explain the procedure, what it means in terms of the recovery period, and what the long-term prognosis is (is it normally a successful procedure?).

The surgical procedures are very successful when done early and provided the techniques used realign the kneecap and it sits in its own groove or a new groove created for it to sit in.

Q Is this something we need to have done straight away or is it something she can live with for a little while? The procedure is quite expensive and both her hind legs need to be operated on.

It is best for surgery to be done while the growth plates are still growing. In small breeds, surgery should be performed preferably before a year and certainly before 18 months of age. The surgery should also preferably be performed by a specialist, or a veterinarian who has done the necessary continuing education to perform the procedure.

Q The vet mentioned the possibility that she could develop arthritis in the joints if we delay it for too long and that, because she's still young (eight months), it's best to perform the operations sooner rather than later.

Would you recommend doing both at the same time or should they be done separately? If so, how long should we wait between the surgeries?

It's best to wait about six weeks between surgeries but that would depend on the severity in both legs and what the surgeon decides is best for the patient. Performing both surgeries together would increase the chance of complication and certainly be a painful ordeal for the dog.

Q Is there anything else that we should be asking the vet before we agree to the procedure and is it likely she'll make a full recovery? We really just want her to be well and don't want to risk her mobility and/or developing arthritis later in life.

I am sure that your veterinarian will be the best person to explain the risk and prognosis to you as each case is unique. There is no harm in asking for a second opinion. Although these patients can develop arthritis later in life, they generally do well and the arthritis is less severe than cases with cranial cruciate ligament rupture.

What is Luxating Patella, or slipped knee caps, in dogs?



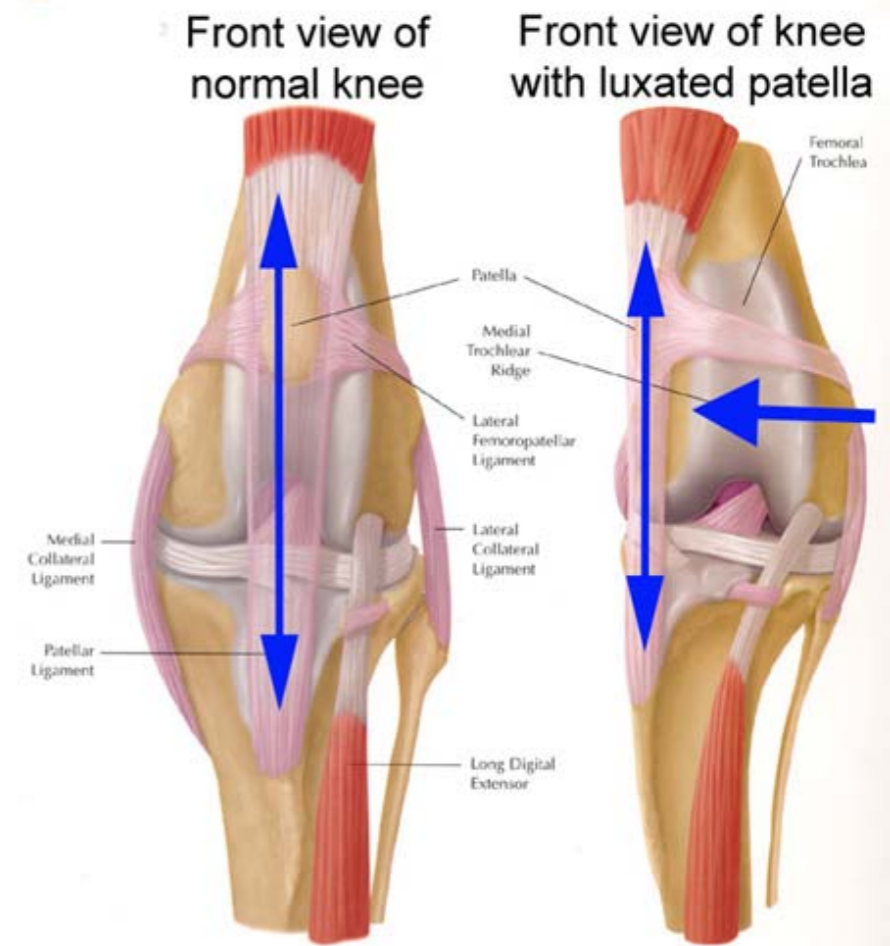
Luxating patellae occur in large and especially small breeds of dogs. Medial luxations occur more commonly in smaller breeds and lateral luxations in large breeds, but the former are more common in both large and small breeds.

As the young animal's bones grow from their growth points, the tension has to be perfect for the long bones, muscles, tendons and kneecap of the hind leg to develop in perfect synchronisation, and in a straight line. Sometimes this does not happen and the long bones start to bow and bend in the knee area. The kneecap usually sits in a groove on the end of the femur and this contact and tension is necessary for the knee to bend and for the groove to develop.

EXPLAINING THE CONDITION

At time of presentation the dog is normally intermittently lame or the owner has noticed the kneecap popping off the groove or the dog skipping occasionally on one leg.

Depending on the severity of bowing of the femur and tibia and degree of luxation of the kneecap, your veterinarian will – with a clinical examination and x-rays – grade the condition from a less serious 1 to a more serious grade 4, where the kneecap does not sit in the patella groove at all. There are of course other conditions causing hind limb lameness which the examination and x-rays will exclude, such as hip conditions, tearing of the knee ligaments (cranial cruciate ligament rupture) and sprains or damage to tendons and muscles.



CORRECTIVE PROCEDURES

The surgical techniques strive to get the bones, muscles, tendons and knee cap in the groove and vary from repositioning the insertion of the kneecap tendon, lateral rotation of the tibia and loosening of the medial thigh tissues with deepening of the kneecap groove to wedge and rotation osteotomies of the femur.

Corrective procedures are best done while the dog is still growing and in more advanced cases by a specialist surgeon. Early intervention will not adversely affect further growth.

The recovery in young patients is very good and seems to carry a better long term result in terms of developing arthritis than cranial cruciate ligament rupture patient. 🐾