

Case Study—July 2013

Georgie is a fit, healthy 2-year-old Staffordshire Bull Terrier who became lame on her left hind leg last October after jumping out of a Ute. She was rested for a few days, but the lameness didn't improve and she was brought to the vet for examination.

Even though she was only lame on her left hind leg, examination revealed problems with both Georgie's knees. She was admitted for X-rays under anaesthetic to evaluate them more thoroughly.

Georgie was found to have ruptured both left and right anterior cruciate ligaments. From the amount of osteoarthritis present in the right knee we were able to determine this knee was injured first, probably as much as 6 months previously. The lack of osteoarthritis in the left knee indicated this was an acute injury that had happened when jumping off the Ute a few weeks before. We decided to repair the left knee first, as it was the most painful, then schedule the right knee for a few months later.

We perform two common methods of cruciate repair at Nicklin Way Veterinary Surgery. The first is an extra capsular repair, where the torn ligament is replaced with a material called Ligafibre, which sits in the same plane as the real ligament, but outside the joint capsule.

The second is a triple tibial osteotomy, or TTO, where a series of 3 cuts are made in the shinbone and a triangular wedge of bone removed. A bone plate is then attached to the shin to stabilize it, and the changed angles within the joint enable it to function without the torn anterior cruciate.

Georgie had steep angles at the top of both shinbones, and as an active dog that loves the beach, we determined a TTO would be the best method of repair for her. She spent her first night after surgery at the vet hospital so her vitals could be monitored and pain relief administered. We use a lot of pain relief in the first few days after surgery. Georgie had Methadone injections, local anaesthetic injected into the joint and Tramadol and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to take home.



At her first recheck, 3 days after surgery, Georgie was already putting moderate weight on the operated leg, and at her next check 10 days after surgery there was barely any lameness detected. The speed with which dogs recover from major orthopaedic surgery is very variable, and depends on a number of factors. The age and breed of dog, their pain tolerance, the amount of cartilage damage within the joint and any other injuries all play a part. Except for dogs that recover very rapidly like Georgie, we recommend physiotherapy with human and animal physiotherapist Nicky Suckle.

At her 6 week post surgery recheck Georgie had actually started to limp on the other back leg, and an X-ray showed the bone was healing well at the first surgery site. She was booked to have the second operation after Christmas. Performing the surgeries separately does mean two recovery periods, but it allowed Georgie to remain

mobile straight after both surgeries, and minimizes the risk of her damaging the repair during the immediate post-operative period.

Georgie outdid herself with her second recovery from surgery. She had almost no lameness 3 days after surgery, and at last check 6 weeks after surgery she was able to start increasing her lead walking from 5 minutes twice a day to 10 minutes twice daily. Once the muscles have returned to near full strength in another month or two, she will be able to start running of lead again.

Anterior cruciate repair is an extremely common orthopaedic condition on the Sunshine Coast, probably due to the large number of dogs that exercise at the beach.

A high percentage of dogs that tear one cruciate ligament will tear the other side within 12 months, so obtaining pet insurance as soon as you acquire a new dog is the best safeguard against these more expensive veterinary bills.

